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## Chapter 6

# The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939: When Did Stalin Decide to Align with Hitler, and Was Poland the Culprit?

Anna M. Cienciala

The official reason given by the Soviet government for the failure of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations for a military and political alliance in late August 1939, was the refusal of Poland and Romania to allow the passage of Soviet troops through their territories in the event of a German attack on those countries. Soviet historians upheld that view, especially blaming Poland, but also accusing the Western powers of planning to set Germany against the USSR, and claiming that this situation gave Stalin no choice but to conclude a pact with Hitler.<sup>1</sup> Although microfilm copies of the secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of August 23, 1939, were found in western Germany at war's end, and were published in the West, Soviet authorities and historians consistently denied the protocol's existence, as did the commissar for foreign affairs, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, who signed it.<sup>2</sup> It is clear, however, that high Soviet officials knew the German and Russian originals were

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1. For an early version of some of these charges, see Vyacheslav M. Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet of August 31, 1939: *God Krizisa, 1938–1939* (Moscow, 1990), vol. 2, [henceforth: GK 2] no. 620; Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. III [henceforth: Degras SDFP III] (Oxford, 1953), 363–371. For the old party line on 1939, see Boris Ponomarev et al., eds., *History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1945* (Moscow, 1969), ch. 11: and Vilnis Sipols, *Diplomatic Battles Before World War II* (Moscow, 1982), ch. IV. On standard Soviet treatments of interwar Polish foreign policy, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Marxism and History: Recent Polish and Soviet Interpretations of Polish Foreign Policy in the Era of Appeasement. An Evaluation," *East European Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1967): 92–117.

2. Molotov, who signed the secret protocol along with Ribbentrop, told a Russian journalist: "There could not have been any such secret agreement. . . . I can assure you that this is unquestionably a fabrication." See Albert Resis, ed., *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago 1993), 13.

kept in sealed envelopes in the Presidential Archives in the Kremlin where they were officially “discovered” in October 1992. Earlier, copies were found and verified in the archives, as admitted publicly in late December 1989.<sup>3</sup>

The lively debate that took place on the pact among Russian historians in 1989, and carried on in Russian works published in the next few years, showed two schools of thought: one close to the former official interpretation, defending Stalin’s policy, while the second condemned it along with other aspects of Stalinism. The 1989 debate began before the official acknowledgment of the existence of the copies and subsequently the originals

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3. The first information on the negotiations for the secret protocol was given at the Nuremberg Trials by the lawyer defending Rudolf Hess, citing a deposition by the German Foreign Ministry legal expert, Friedrich Gauss, who was present at the negotiations, see Alfred Seidl, *Der Fall Rudolf Hess 1941–1987. Dokumentation des Verteidigers*, 3<sup>rd</sup>, expanded printing (Munich, 1988), 93–95. However, the Allied prosecutors agreed to the Soviet request that this evidence was inadmissible at the Nuremberg Trials.

On the history of the microfilm containing the secret protocol, see: Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt. Hitler, Stalin unter die Initiative der deutschen Diplomatie 1938–1939* (Berlin, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990), note 139, 533–534. The Secret protocol of August 23, 1939, was first published in the British press by the *Manchester Guardian*, 30 May 1946. It was then published in *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939–1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*, Washington, 1948, 78, and republished in *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (henceforth: DGFP) ser. D, vol. VII (London, Washington, 1956), no. 229; for the Russian texts see GK 2 (Moscow, 1990) nos. 602, 603 and *Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki. Vol. XXII, 1939 god. Kniga I*, [henceforth: DVP 1939 I] (Moscow, 1992), no. 485.

On finding verified copies of the secret protocol, see Alexander N. Yakovlev’s speech to the Second Congress of People’s Deputies, December 24, 1989, Russian text, *Izvestiia*, December 25, 1989, reprinted in: O.A. Rzheshesvskii, ed., *1939 God. Urokii Istorii* [henceforth: 1939 God] (Moscow, 1990), appendix, 492–493. For the Congress’s condemnation of the secret protocols announced on December 25, see: Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Pravda*, December 28, 1989, reprint in *1939 God*, 496–497; brief excerpt in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 1990, no. 42, #09, 11.1; for the full text of the reports, see *On the Political and Legal Assessment of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Treaty of 1939* (Moscow, 1990).

On the first discovery of original German and Russian copies of the secret protocol in the Russian Presidential Archives, when Gorbachev handed over power to Boris N. Yeltsin, see interview given by Yakovlev—who was present—to Michael Dobbs, in his: *Down with Big Brother. The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 1996), 447–448. On the discovery of the Secret protocol by Russian archivists and historians in October 1992, see Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire. The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime*, trans. and ed. Harold Shukman (New York and London), 1998, 528, cf. Lev Bezymensky, “The Secret Protocols of 1939 as a Problem of Soviet Historiography,” in Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1991. A Retrospective* (London, 1994), 83–84.

of the secret protocol, though a selection of German and Soviet documents published that year clearly impelled this acknowledgment. Nevertheless, many Russian historians still believe that Western appeasement of Germany, and the Soviet need for time, left Stalin no other option than the pact with Hitler to ensure the country's security.<sup>4</sup>

The policy of the Polish government, touted by Soviet historiography as the decisive factor in the failure of Soviet-Western military negotiations in August 1939, was viewed in the same way by some Western participants. Thus, in the memoirs of Sir Robert Strang (then assistant secretary for foreign affairs and head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, who assisted the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Seeds, from mid-June to early August 1939), Warsaw's refusal of the Soviet demand for the passage of the Red Army through Poland was presented as the decisive factor in the breakdown of the negotiations.<sup>5</sup> This was also the view of French captain (later general) André Beaufre, a member of the French contingent in the Anglo-French military mission in Moscow.<sup>6</sup> He was sent to Warsaw to help persuade the Polish government to accept the Soviet demand; years later, he still believed the Polish refusal led to the breakdown of negotiations. However, two key British participants who were in Moscow at the time, thought otherwise. General T. G. Heywood, head of the army section of the British military delegation, thought France and Britain never had a chance because the Russians had been playing both sides to get the highest price, and the British ambassador, Sir William Seeds, was happy

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4. For a brief survey of the debate among Russian historians, see: M.I. Mel'miukhov, "Predyistoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny v sovremennykh diskussiiakh," in G.A. Bordiagov, ed., *Istoricheskie Issledovaniia v Rossii. Tendentsii poslednikh let* (Moscow, 1996), 278–307; on 1939, *ibid.*, 278–283. For a condemnation of Stalin for signing the pact, see: V.L. Doroshenko, "Stalinskaiia provokatsiia vtoroi mirovoi voiny," in: *Drugaiia Voina 1939–1945* (Moscow), 1996, 60–72; Lev I. Ginzburg, "Sovetsko-Germanskii pakt: Zamysel i ego realizatsiia," *Otechestvennaii Istorii*, no. 3 (1996), 29–40; and M. I. Semiriaga, *Tainy stalinskoi diplomatsii, 1939–1941* (Moscow, 1992), an earlier version of which appeared as "Sovetsko-Germanskiie dogovorennosti v 1939—iunie 1941: Vzgliaid istorika," *Sovetskie Gosudarstvo i Pravo*, no.9 (1989), 92–104.

5. Lord Strang, *At Home and Abroad* (London, 1956), 189–190. Strang had been the British chargé d'affaires in Moscow in the early 1930s. For a brief biographical sketch, see Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came. The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938–1939* (London, 1989), 361–362.

6. For Beaufre's account of his mission to Warsaw, see General [André] Beaufre, *Mémoires 1920—1940—1945* (Paris, 1965), 144–151.



to accuse Molotov of bad faith to his face.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Western historians generally sided with Strang and Beaufre. A quarter of a century after the Moscow negotiations, the British historian, A. J. P. Taylor, a defender of British appeasement, condemned Polish foreign policy for being unreasonable and for pretending to great power status, while he credited the USSR with the intention of attacking Germany in case of war. He blamed the Western powers and Poland for the failure of negotiations with Moscow, and contended that the Nazi-Soviet pact was neither an alliance nor a partition of Poland.<sup>8</sup> Although Taylor's views were more extreme than most, Western historians generally agreed that the Poles were either partly or largely to blame for the failure of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations and, thus, for the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact.

As mentioned earlier, in 1989, on the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, much was written about the pact in Russia, but positive interpretations of Stalin's policy held a significant edge. There was no such debate in the West; indeed, the vast majority of Western historical periodicals did not even discuss it. British historians and writers who did so, generally agreed that Stalin had no other option but to align with Hitler, and castigated Poland for her refusal to accept Soviet troops into its territory. Thus, two journalist-historians, Anthony Reed and David Fisher, approvingly cited journalist-historian William Shirer to the effect that Polish "self-destructiveness" had been responsible for the partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century, and that the Poles were guilty of "willful blindness" in refusing to consider Soviet demands for Red Army passage in August 1939. To this, the two authors added their own disparaging comment: "Like the three little pigs, the Poles still frolicked inside their straw house while the big bad wolf was already drawing breath on the outside."<sup>9</sup>

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7. For general T. G. Heywood's opinion, see point 8 in his letter of August 23 to the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, *Documents on British Foreign Policy* [henceforth: DBFP], 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. VII (London, 1954), app. II, no. 6, 607. For Seeds to Molotov on bad faith, see Seeds to Halifax, August 29, 1939, in D.C. Watt, ed., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Part II, Series A. *The Soviet Union 1917-1939*, vol. 15 (Lanham, MD., 1986), 144.

8. For examples of Taylor's disparaging opinion of Foreign Minister Józef Beck and Polish foreign policy, see *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961), 80-81, 251; on the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 262. For a penetrating critique of Taylor's views on Poland, see Piotr S. Wandycz, "Poland between East and West," ch. 8 in Gordon Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered. The A.J.P. Taylor Debate After Twenty-Five Years* (Boston, London, Sydney, 1986), 187-209.

9. Anthony Reed and David Fisher, *The Deadly Embrace. Hitler, Stalin, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact, 1939-1941* (New York and London, 1988), 214-215. William L. Shirer (1904-93) was the Universal News Service correspondent in Berlin, 1934-37, also Columbia Broadcasting Service correspondent in Vienna, 1935-37, Prague

On a scholarly level, the leading German historian of Soviet-German relations in 1938–39, Ingeborg Fleischhauer, contended that the Polish refusal to allow the passage of Soviet troops eliminated Moscow's option of an alliance with the Western powers. However, some German historians disagreed. They perceived Stalin's goal as either expanding communism after an exhausting European war in which the USSR would be neutral, or as Soviet territorial expansion, or a combination of both.<sup>10</sup>

After the publication in 1990–1992 of Soviet diplomatic documents for 1939,<sup>11</sup> most Western historians still hewed to their previous views. Thus, British historian Geoffrey Roberts concluded that, while an agreement with Nazi Germany was always an option for Stalin, “not until the final breakdown of the military negotiations with Britain and France were the Germans invited to cross the threshold.” He claimed that this was an act of desperation on Stalin's part, and also endorsed Taylor's view of the Nazi-Soviet pact.<sup>12</sup> Another British historian, Jonathan Haslam, had concluded earlier (1984) that:

Confronted with the evident unwillingness of the Entente to provide immediate, concrete, and water-tight guarantees for Soviet security in Europe, let alone in Asia . . . the Russians were left with little alternative but an agreement with Germany creating a condominium in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, the Nazi-Soviet pact was unquestionably the second best solution.<sup>13</sup>

Haslam thought that Stalin kept his options open until it was clear that the Anglo-French military delegation was not ready to grant Soviet demands.

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and Berlin, 1937–40, then war correspondent 1941–45; see his *Berlin Diary, 1934–1941* (New York, 1941), and *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1961). He was very critical of Polish foreign policy, particularly with regard to the USSR.

10. Ingeborg Fleischhauer, “Soviet Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Hitler-Stalin Pact,” in Bernd Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War. Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939–1941* (Oxford, 1997), 31, 43. For the view that Stalin aimed to expand communism after a European war, see Gottfried Schramm, “Basic Features of German Ostpolitik, 1918–1939,” Wegner, *ibid.*, 24; for a similar view, see Rolf Ahmann, “Der Hitler-Stalin Pakt: Nichtangriffs- und Angriffsvertrag?” in: Erwin Oberländer, ed., *Hitler-Stalin Pakt 1939: Das Ende Mitteleuropas?* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1989), 26–42; and Jorg K. Hoensch, *ibid.*, 50.

11. See note 3 above. *DVP 1939 I* contains more new Russian documents than *God Krizisa*, published in 1990.

12. Geoffrey Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War. Russo-German Relations and the Road to War, 1933–1941* (New York, 1995), 86, 92. For an earlier work by this author, with similar conclusions, see *The Unholy Alliance. Stalin's Pact with Hitler* (Bloomington, IN., 1989).

13. Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–1939* (New York, 1984), 231.

However, in 1994, he concluded that Stalin had opted for Hitler as early as the dismissal of Maxim M. Litvinov from the post of commissar of foreign affairs in early May 1939. This view is shared by some Russian historians, for example, Lev I. Ginzberg.<sup>14</sup> Fleischhauer contends, however, that Stalin finally made up his mind on August 21, when it was clear that the British and French delegations had no answer to give on the passage of Soviet troops through Poland and Romania. An American historian, Teddy Uldricks, rejects all existing theories in favor of the simple explanation that Stalin was a realist and sought security wherever he could find it, a view shared by Gabriel Gorodetsky.<sup>15</sup> According to Canadian historian Michael Jabara Carlay, [Foreign Minister Józef] "Beck was the *bete noire* of just about everyone in Europe" and "... Litvinov regarded him as a Nazi pimp." [sic]. Finally, Carlay writes: "Polish opposition to collective security and Polish collusion with Nazi Germany immensely irritated Soviet and French diplomats and led ultimately to Poland's disappearance."<sup>16</sup> As for the Poles, most have always believed—as did the Polish government in August 1939—that Stalin wanted to stay out of the war, preferred a deal with Hitler, and deliberately double-crossed France and Britain. This was also the view of exiled Polish historians, shared later by their colleagues in Poland when they could write freely on the subject after the collapse of communism in 1989.<sup>17</sup> However, with the exception of some German scholars, Gerhard L. Weinberg, the leading American historian of Nazi foreign policy, and Donald Cameron Watt, the premier British diplomatic historian of this period, most Western historians still see the Nazi-Soviet pact as

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14. Haslam: "Litvinov, Stalin and the Road not Taken," in Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 58; also Ginzburg, "Sovetsko-germanskii pakt," 30. However, the majority view is expressed by Vladimir Sokolov: "The question of Litvinov's resignation was ripe for decision if the Soviet government did not intend to pursue a policy oriented to Britain and France, but an independent policy meeting the country's national rather than ideological needs." Sokolov, "People's Commissar Maxim Litvinov," *International Affairs*, no. 5, (Moscow, 1991): 93–107.

15. Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 339; Teddy J. Uldricks, "Soviet Security in the 1930s," in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 73; see also Gabriel Gorodetsky, *Grand Illusion. Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia* (New Haven and London, 1999), 8–9.

16. Michael Jabara Carlay, 1939: *The Alliance That Never Was And The Coming Of World War II* (Chicago, 1999), p. 68.

17. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski, 1864–1945*, vol. II, 1864–1939 (London, 1956, reprint Warsaw, 1981), ch. 22; Stanisław Gregorowicz, Michał J. Zacharias, *Polska—Związek Sowiecki. Stosunki polityczne 1925–1939* (Warsaw, 1995), ch. XV; Wojciech Materski, *Tarcza Europy. Stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 1994), ch. VI, section 5.

either the only, or at least the logical, choice for Stalin.<sup>18</sup> Most historians also view the demand for Red Army passage through Poland as natural, and see the Polish refusal as either key to the breakdown of Franco-British military negotiations with the USSR, or at least a significant contributing factor. In contrast to the above, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate that most of the available evidence indicates Stalin always preferred a pact with Germany, and that he used negotiations with the Western powers to pressure Hitler into an agreement with the USSR. Finally, it will also show that Poland did not play any significant role in Stalin's decision to sign the nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany.

It is, of course, true that the Poles distrusted the Soviet Union. This was not surprising, given Russia's role in the partitions of Poland, and then her oppressive rule over her share of Polish lands.<sup>19</sup> After World War I, Lenin's attempt to destroy the reborn Polish state was foiled by Marshal Józef Piłsudski in the Battle of the Vistula in mid-August 1920. This defeat rankled deep with the Russians, together with great resentment at the loss of western Ukraine and western Belorussia to Poland in the Treaty of Riga (March 18, 1921).<sup>20</sup> As for the Poles, they distrusted both of their great neighbors

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18. On these German historians, see note 10 above. According to Gerhard L. Weinberg, "A war between Germany and the Western Powers looked to the Soviet leader like the best prospect for both the safety and the future expansion of Soviet power," Germany, *Hitler and World War II. Essays in Modern German History* (Cambridge, England, 1995), 176. D. C. Watt distributes blame for the failure of the Moscow negotiations equally between the British and the French on the one side and the Soviets on the other. However, he adds the proviso that having a paid Soviet spy in the foreign office communications center (Francis Herbert King), and a master spy in Japan (Richard Sorge), the director of Soviet negotiations with Britain and Germany was "like a poker player with marked cards." Watt suspects the conviction that Hitler's main targets were Britain and France was central to Soviet policy, *How War Came*, 231, 369.

19. For Poland under Russian rule and national uprisings, see Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795–1918* (Seattle, WA, and London, 1974); and Norman Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland. Vol. II. 1795 to the Present* (New York, 1982), ch. 2.

20. For the diplomatic history of the Soviet-Polish War, see Wandycz, *Soviet-Polish Relations 1917–1921* (Cambridge, MA., 1969); on the military side, see Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star. The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (London, 1972). For Lenin's statements at a closed session of the Ninth Party Conference on September 22, 1920 (first published in Russia in 1992), on the reasons for the Soviet rejection of the Curzon Line and the decision to advance into Poland, see Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York, 1993), 181–183. For the Treaty of Riga, see *Documents on Polish-Soviet Relations 1939–1945*, vol. 1. 1939–1943 [henceforth: *DPSR*] (London, 1961), no. 3.

and conducted their foreign policy accordingly. In view of German claims to Polish western territories and the well known, if muted, Soviet claims to eastern Poland, the cardinal principle of interwar Polish foreign policy was "equilibrium" or nonalignment with either neighboring power, but maintaining equilibrium between them. This policy was bolstered by an alliance with France to secure the latter's aid in case of war with Germany, and a defensive alliance with Romania in case of war with the USSR. The equilibrium policy was characterized by the Polish-Soviet Nonaggression Treaty (1932) and the Declaration of Nonaggression with Germany (1934, for ten years), after which the Polish-Soviet treaty was extended for ten years.<sup>21</sup> However, due to Hitler's policy of courting Warsaw, Polish relations were more amicable with Berlin than with Moscow from 1934 until March 1939. The agreement with Berlin recognized Poland's existing alliances, that is, with France and Romania. Thus, equilibrium was a well known Polish policy, which was reiterated to Moscow several times in the course of the fateful spring and summer of 1939.<sup>22</sup>

Poland's distrust of the USSR was shared by the European peoples who had been subject to Russia in the past; that is: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and also by Romania whose possession of Bessarabia was never recognized by the USSR. The Soviet Union was also distrusted by most West European statesmen, who saw their views confirmed by Soviet declarations and official statements, especially Stalin's speech to the Eighteenth Party Congress on March 10. He then declared Soviet readiness to help victims of aggression—but also accused France and Britain of setting Germany against the USSR and said the Soviet Union would not pull chestnuts out of the fire for other powers.<sup>23</sup>

Two days after Hitler's destruction of the Czechoslovak state (March 15, 1939), and with rumors flying of a German threat to Romania, the British inquired whether Moscow would declare its readiness to aid Romania in case of aggression. The Soviet government, in turn, proposed a conference in Bucharest for joint consultation.<sup>24</sup> This was turned down by the

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21. For the texts of the Polish-Soviet nonaggression pact of July 25, 1932 and its ten-year extension on May 5, 1934, see *DPSR*, nos. 6, 10; for the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression of January 26, 1934, see *DGFP*, C, vol. II (London and Washington, 1959), no. 291.

22. For a brief study of interwar Polish foreign policy, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Polish Foreign Policy, 1926–1939; 'Equilibrium,' Stereotype and Reality," *Polish Review*, vol. XX, no. 1 (1975): 42–58.

23. For extracts from Stalin's speech of March 10, 1939 to the Eighteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, see Degras, *SDFP* III, 315–322.

24. For the British inquiry, see Foreign Secretary Viscount Halifax to Ambassador Seeds, March 17, *DBFP*, 3rd ser., vol. IV (London, 1951), no. 389; for Seeds' conversation with Litvinov on March 18, and his report on Litvinov's proposals of

British government, which proposed, on March 21, a declaration on consultation in case of a threat of further aggression to France, the USSR, Poland, and Romania. The Polish government refused to sign because, as the Polish foreign minister claimed, Poland's signature alongside the USSR would provoke a German attack on her. The real motives, however, were both distrust of Moscow and the goal of keeping the door open to a compromise settlement of the Danzig-Corridor question with Germany, which would be compatible with Poland's security and independence. Instead of signing the declaration, Beck proposed a secret Anglo-Polish agreement on consultation, which the British accepted. This led to the conclusion of a provisional agreement on mutual assistance, signed on April 6, during Beck's visit to Britain. Beck explained the Polish position to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain saying that the Poles had no confidence in Soviet Russia. On the basis of their experience, they saw no difference between Soviet and Tsarist imperialism, but in the face of the German threat they thought it advisable that, at a minimum, Russia's neutrality should be secured. They did not believe that Russia would honestly join Poland's allies, but they would not oppose British and French efforts to reach an understanding with Moscow. Beck added that, as in the case of the negotiations for the Franco-Soviet alliance (1935), the Polish government would insist that no treaty concluded by its Western allies without their participation could impose any obligations on Poland. But he also declared the Poles would welcome any Allied agreement with the Soviets, which would allow the transit of military supplies and the delivery of Soviet raw materials to Poland.<sup>25</sup>

The Polish attitude toward the USSR was based, not only on memories of the past and hopes of a peaceful resolution of disputes with Germany,

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March 19, *ibid.*, nos. 403, 421; for the Russian text of the Soviet proposal of March 18, see Litvinov to Stalin, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 150, also Litvinov to Soviet ambassadors in London and Paris, March 18, 1939, *Soviet Peace Efforts on the Eve of World War II* [henceforth: *SPE*] (Moscow, 2nd printing, 1976), no. 109. For British documents on the Declaration on Consultation, see *DBFP*, *ibid.*, chapter V.

25. See annotated edition of Józef Beck's memoirs: *Polska polityka zagraniczna w latach 192–1939. Na podstawie tekstów min. Józefa Becka opracowała Anna M. Cienciala* Paris, (1990), 245–246; cf. the French edition of Beck's memoirs, Colonel Józef Beck, *Dernier Rapport. Politique polonaise 1926–1939* (Neuchâtel and Paris, 1951), 93–194; English edition, *Final Report* (New York, 1957). For British records of Beck's London talks, see *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., vol. V (London, 1952), nos. 1,2,10, 16, also Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938–1939. A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe* (London, Toronto, 1968), 216–217. This work was based on Polish archival documents in the *Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum*, London (henceforth *PISM*), also on published British, French, German, and Italian documents available at that time. For a later study of the topic in 1939, based on Polish and other archival documents, see Cienciala article cited in note 41 below.

but also on certain key assumptions, some of which were shared by non-Polish observers. Thus, from Warsaw's point of view, a German-Soviet alliance was seen as most unlikely for ideological reasons, which was, incidentally, also the view prevalent in the West. Furthermore, from the military point of view, the Poles did not expect the USSR to participate in any offensive action against Germany because the Soviet officer corps had been decapitated by the purge of 1937—a view shared by both the French and British General Staffs. Finally, the Poles thought a German-Soviet partition of Poland would be unacceptable to the Soviets because it would bring the formidable German army and air force that much nearer to Moscow, thus posing a mortal threat to Soviet security—a view shared by many Western observers, though some entertained such a possibility. Therefore, the Poles expected a German attack on their country to bring them automatic Soviet aid.<sup>26</sup> They were confirmed in their views by Soviet statements that the USSR would supply Poland with raw materials—at least, within the framework of the trade agreement signed in February 1939, ratified on May 16—and probably with military supplies and air support in case of a German-Polish war.<sup>27</sup>

However, friendly public declarations aside, the Soviet attitude toward Poland was characterized by profound hostility and suspicion. Moscow's attempts to pin down the Polish government on the declaration of consultation seem to have been designed less to elicit Polish agreement than to document an expected Polish refusal. Thus, Litvinov told Seeds on March 21 that he was sure Poland would not accept the commitments under the declaration on consultation in case of further German aggression, as proposed by London. He also confided to French Chargé d'Affaires Jean Payart, on March 29, that he felt Beck's "line" was unlikely to change until Poland received a direct blow. Despite these views, the Soviet government made

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26. The opinion of the Polish ambassador to the USSR, Wacław Grzybowski, was typical. He told Undersecretary of State, Jan Szembek, on June 26, 1939, that he did not believe the rumors of German-Soviet talks because Moscow could not permit a German victory over Poland, and thus have Germany as a neighbor, see Jan Zarański, ed., *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka, 1935–1939*, vol. IV (London, 1972), 641. This was also the policy evaluation given by the Polish General Staff to Col. Stefan Brzeszczyński, Polish military attaché in Moscow, when he visited Warsaw in early June, see Brzeszczyński report to the War Minister, Paris, December 31, 1939, Kol. 79, *PISM*. On June 29, the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Moscow reported a similar statement by a member of the Polish embassy; see *Foreign Relations of the United States. Diplomatic Papers. 1939*. Vol. I. *General*, [henceforth *FRUS 1939 I*] (Washington, D.C., 1956), 196.

27. For the Polish-Soviet trade agreement of February 19, ratified on May 16, 1939, see *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich*, vol. VII, January 1939–December 1943, [henceforth: *DiM VII*] (Warsaw, 1973), nos. 12–17, 63–64.

Poland's signature—along with that of France—the condition for its own adherence to the declaration.<sup>28</sup> One may well ask why Moscow insisted that Poland sign the declaration on consultation, if she was expected not to do so? Perhaps Stalin saw this as a test of whether Britain and France would force Poland to sign? Whatever the case may be, Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vladimir P. Potemkin did not, as is sometimes claimed, offer a mutual assistance pact to the Polish foreign minister when they met in Warsaw on May 10, 1939. This was five days after Beck's speech to the Polish Parliament, in which he answered Hitler's statements of April 28. Beck declared Poland's determination to not be cut off from the Baltic Sea, but at the same time, Polish desire for peace—though not at any price, and especially not at the price of honor. Molotov instructed Potemkin to stop in the Polish capital on his way home from a tour of the Balkans and Turkey because Beck had expressed a desire to see him. Potemkin's main task was to learn what was going on between Poland and Germany, but Molotov also authorized him to "hint" at possible Soviet aid to Poland. According to Potemkin's brief, published telegram, that is all he did, saying the USSR would not refuse assistance to Poland if she desired it.<sup>29</sup>

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28. See Seeds to Halifax, March 21, 1939, *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. vol. IV (London, 1951), no. 461; Litvinov's report does not include his remark on Poland, *GK*, 1, no. 209. In his telegram of March 21 to Soviet ambassadors in Britain and France, Litvinov stated the Soviet government would sign the declaration as soon as France and Poland promised their signatures, *SPE* no. 122, *GK* 1, no. 215 and *SVP* 1939 I, no.162. For Litvinov's remark to Payart, see extract in: *SPE*, no. 132, 226, not included in published Russian and French documents. For Litvinov's and Potemkin's conversations with Polish Ambassador Grzybowski regarding Poland's signature of the declaration, see *DiM* VII, nos. 32, 37, 42, 43, 46; also *GK*. 1, nos. 226, 251, and *DVP* 1939, I, nos. 183, 189.

29. For Beck's speech of May 5, 1939, see *The Polish White Book. Official Documents concerning Polish-German and Polish-Soviet Relations 1933–1939* [henceforth *PWB*] (London and New York, 1940), no.77. By saying Poland wanted peace but "not at the price of honor," Beck meant giving up Polish independence without a fight. His speech, prepared in consultation with the British government, answered Hitler's speech of April 28, in which the latter denounced the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of 1935, and the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression, and listed the proposals Poland had rejected, i.e., the return of Danzig and part of the Polish Corridor to the Reich in exchange for German recognition of the Polish-German frontier, saying he would never offer them again. For Molotov's instruction to Potemkin, May 10, 1939, see *DVP*, 1939, I, no.293; for Potemkin's brief telegram on his conversation with Beck that day, see *SPE*, no. 210; for the same text in Russian, see *DiM*, VII, no. 60, *GK* 1, no. 330. Fleischhauer interprets Potemkin's remarks as a proposal for a Polish-Soviet assistance pact, which was rejected, see her article in Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War*, 34. Elsewhere she writes that Beck's declarations to Potemkin were "a bitter pill" for the Russians, who had hoped for an assistance pact with Poland, *Der Pakt*, 188. There is no documented evidence of a Moscow proposal for a Soviet-Polish assistance pact, or of Russian hopes for same.



Whatever else Potemkin may have said, he managed to give Beck the impression that Moscow understood Poland's nonalignment policy, and that the Poles would never attack the USSR in tandem with Germany. Beck also noted Potemkin's statement that Moscow would adopt a policy of benevolent neutrality in case of a Polish-German war.<sup>30</sup> By this time, of course, Litvinov had been replaced as commissar for foreign affairs by Molotov (May 3), and Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations were proceeding toward a treaty guaranteeing the USSR's western neighbors against German aggression. In order to avoid any misunderstandings of Beck's statements to Potemkin, Ambassador Grzybowski clarified the Polish position to Molotov the following day. He read to him the instruction just received from Warsaw: (1) Poland did not agree with, nor authorize, the French initiative regarding guarantees to Poland; (2) she could not accept a one-sided Soviet guarantee, nor a mutual guarantee because, if she were totally engaged in a conflict with Germany, she could not aid the Soviet Union; (3) the Polish attitude toward collective negotiations would depend on the results of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, but Poland rejected all discussion of matters affecting her other than by bilateral methods; (4) the Polish-Romanian alliance was purely defensive, so it could not be regarded as in any way directed against the USSR.<sup>31</sup>

It is not known what Potemkin actually reported to Molotov when he returned to Moscow because this document is not accessible as yet. It is known, however, that when the new Soviet ambassador to Warsaw, Nikolai I. Sharonov, took up his post in late May, he also professed Soviet friend-

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30. On May 13, Beck wrote Juliusz Łukasiewicz, the Polish ambassador in Paris, that conversations with Potemkin on May 10 made it clear the Soviet government understood the Polish point of view on relations with the USSR, and realized the Polish government did not intend to reach agreement with either great neighbor against the other. Beck wrote: "Mr. Potemkin also stated that in the event of an armed conflict between Poland and Germany, the Soviets will adopt 'une attitude bienveillante' towards us,," *PWB* no. 163, *DPSR* no.19. Beck confirmed this statement in his memoirs. He also noted that the new Soviet ambassador [Nikolai Sharonov] told him a few days later that Molotov had studied Potemkin's report several times and judged the conversation to be very positive, saying: "I quite understand Colonel Beck"—to which the latter answered he still understood Molotov quite well, see: Beck (Cienciala, ed.), *Polska polityka zagraniczna*, 253.

31. For Grzybowski's statement to Molotov, May 11, see *SPE*, no.212, Russian text: *DiM*, VII, no. 62, *GK* 1, no. 336, *DVP*, 1939, I, no. 298; see also Grzybowski's "Final Report," Paris, November 6, 1939, *PWB*, no.184, reprinted with some abbreviations in *DPSR*, no. 69. "French initiatives" meant French efforts aimed at the conclusion of a triple alliance between France, Britain, and the USSR involving Poland, but not necessarily with the latter's agreement.

ship for Poland and hinted at Moscow's readiness to help Poland.<sup>32</sup> This and similar declarations may have been designed to support Polish determination to resist German demands by force, but it is clear Sharonov did not believe the Poles would really do so. His report to Molotov of August 23 probably reflected not only his opinion but also the views of the Soviet leadership throughout the spring and summer of 1939. Sharonov wrote that Poland was preparing to bow to England's peace policy, if she had not already done so; therefore a German-Polish war over Danzig was unlikely.<sup>33</sup>

It should be borne in mind that Stalin's decision to sign the nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany, however astounding to most contemporaries, had solid historical precedents. Russia and Prussia, later Germany, had enjoyed friendly relations for most of the period 1772–1914, and this relationship—in which the Austrian Empire was the third partner—was founded on the partitions of Poland. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917, came the peace of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers in March 1918, in which Lenin gave up the western provinces of the former Russian Empire rather than continue the war and thus risk losing power. The peace allowed Germany to launch powerful offensives on the western front, but her ultimate defeat nullified the peace of Brest-Litovsk. In April 1922, the Rapallo Treaty normalized German-Soviet relations and canceled mutual claims, while the Treaty of Berlin, signed four years later, was in essence a nonaggression agreement between the two countries. Until the advent of Hitler, relations were very good and military cooperation flourished. Even after Hitler terminated the latter in fall 1933, trade relations continued. Indeed, Stalin, in his report to the Seventeenth Congress of the CPSU on January 26, 1934 (the day the Polish-German Declaration of Nonaggression was signed), said that fascism was not the issue, for it did not prevent good Soviet relations with Italy. This policy line led to the

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32. Ambassador Sharonov reported on May 25, that he told Beck the Soviet Union would be willing to help Poland if the latter was attacked by Germany, but that earlier talks were necessary to make such help possible, *DiM VII*, no. 66, *GK I*, no. 373, *DVP 1939*, I, no.334. On presenting his credentials to Polish President Ignacy Mościcki on June 2, Sharonov said his mission was to support and develop friendly Polish-Soviet relations based on a series of mutual political and economic agreements. Close and fruitful cooperation between the two countries was, he said, a factor in the consolidation of universal peace and it was in keeping with Soviet policy to have peaceful and friendly relations with all countries, especially with its neighbors, see *PWB*, no. 165, *DiM VII*, no.70. This was two days after Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet, in which he used the same phrases on Soviet relations with Poland, see: Degras, *SDFP*, III, 337.

33. Sharonov's report of August 23, 1939, *DVP 1939*, I, no. 489; on Poland and Germany, *ibid.*, p. 640.

conclusion of a German-Soviet trade-credit agreement in early April 1935, whereby Germany gave the Soviet Union a credit of two hundred million RM to purchase German manufactured goods in return for Soviet raw materials.<sup>34</sup> While trade continued, German-Soviet relations deteriorated but Litvinov (perceived then as now as the champion of collective security) declared publicly in December 1937 that collective security was dead and that a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and Germany was perfectly possible.<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 was mainly the result of efforts by those German Foreign Ministry officials who wanted a return to Rapallo, as Fleischhauer contends,<sup>36</sup> it is clear that such a return was desired by some members of the German diplomatic and military establishment. All available evidence points to the fact that this was also the Soviet goal. However, the question of when Stalin decided to pursue it is still a matter of debate because authoritative Russian documentation is lacking. The most important source for his policy decisions might well be the records of discussions in Stalin's "Kremlin Cabinet." This body consisted, in order of importance, of Stalin; Molotov, Politburo member, head of the Sovnarkom (Council of National Commissars), and from early May, commissar for foreign affairs; Andrei A. Zhdanov, head of the Leningrad party organization and Politburo member in charge of ideology; Anastas I. Mikoyan, Politburo member and deputy premier in charge of foreign and domestic trade; Lazar M. Kaganovich, Politburo member in charge of agriculture;

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34. For documents on German-Soviet military cooperation, see Yuri Dyakov & Tatyana Bushuyeva, *The Red Army and the Wehrmacht. How the Soviets Militarized Germany, 1922–1933, and Paved the Way for Fascism* (New York, 1995). For Stalin on Germany, January 26, 1934, Degras, *SDFP*, III, 70. For the German-Soviet trade agreement signed April 9, 1935, see: *DGFP C IV* (London and Washington, 1962), nos. 20, 21.

35. For Litvinov on collective security as dead, see his interview with the Moscow correspondent of *Le Monde*, late December 1937, cit. Hugh D. Phillips, *Between the Revolution and the West. A Political Biography of Maxim M. Litvinov* (Boulder, CO., 1992), 163; French text, Ambassador Robert Coulondre to Premier Yvon Delbos, December 27, 1937, Documents *Diplomatiques Français* [henceforth: DDF], 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. vol. VII (Paris, 1972), no. 30, enclosure, "Note de M. Luciani."

36. Fleischhauer claims that Stalin's remark on not pulling chestnuts out of the fire for others in his speech of March 10, 1939, was taken up by the "old" Wilhelmstrasse officials, who built on this phrase to pursue the German national interest as they saw it, and worked to get Ribbentrop's support for a deal with Soviet Russia—see Fleischhauer in Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War*, 33. This is also the theme of her major work, *Der Pakt*.

Lavrenty P. Beria, candidate member of the Politburo, commissar of the NKVD (National Commissariat of Internal Security); Marshal Kliment Y. Voroshilov, member of the Politburo and commissar for military and naval affairs, also others as needed. Selected officials, including Molotov, who was nearly always present, met almost every night with the "Vozhd" (leader) in his Kremlin office to discuss current problems and policy. However, only the dates and lists of visitors for each day are available. Aside from the lack of these records, Politburo, Central Committee, Foreign Affairs Commissariat documents, also NKVD and GRU (Military Intelligence) documents illustrating Soviet foreign policy decision-making are missing from the Russian sources published thus far, and are still inaccessible in Russian archives.<sup>37</sup>

In the absence of authoritative documents on Soviet foreign policy decision-making, it is worth mentioning that a handful of Soviet defectors reported Stalin had wanted a deal with Hitler for some time before August 1939. Among them was the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Rome, Leon B. Helphand, who defected to the West in summer 1940. However, the first published claim that Stalin preferred a deal with Hitler to one with the Western powers was made by Walter Krivitsky, the head of Soviet military intelligence in Western Europe, then Spain, until his defection in 1937, when he feared the Stalinist purges would engulf him as well. Krivitsky published a series of articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* in April 1939 asserting that Stalin had sought an agreement with Nazi Germany since 1934. Later, he publicized the theory—shared by Polish statesmen and some Western observers—that Soviet negotiations for an alliance with France and Britain were a fraud. In support of this claim, Krivitsky adduced Stalin's refusal to believe in a German threat to the USSR. According to Krivitsky, when the German-Soviet trade-credit agreement was concluded in April 1935, Stalin said that Hitler could not make war on the USSR—because German business circles were too powerful to allow it. Krivitsky also claimed that the head of the Soviet trade delegation in Berlin, David Kandelaki, brought with him the draft of a German-Soviet agreement when he re-

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37. For names of visitors in Stalin's appointment book for 1938–1939, see "Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalina. Zhurnaly (Tetradi) Zapisy lits priiniatykh pervym gensekom, 1924–1953;" *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, no. 5–6 (Moscow, 1995): 5–63, [henceforth: IA 1995, no. 5–6]. On declassified documents and general comments on Russian archives, Raymond L. Garthoff, "Some Observations on Using the Soviet Archives," *Diplomatic History*, no. 5 (1997): 243–258; also Michael David Fox and David Hoffmann, "The Politburo Protocols, 1919–49," *The Russian Review*, vol. 55 (1996): 99–103.

turned to Moscow in April 1937.<sup>38</sup> If there was such a draft, it did not survive in German archives, though German documents record Soviet soundings of Germany in 1935–36. Thus, on May 8, 1935, Litvinov told the German ambassador in Moscow, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, that since the Soviet Union had signed an alliance with France, he hoped it would soon be followed by a general nonaggression agreement, “of the kind suggested by Germany.” This would, said Molotov, lessen the significance of the Franco-Soviet pact and lead to the improvement of German-Soviet relations, “which the Soviet Government desired above all things and which they now considered possible.”<sup>39</sup> This proposal was made just six days after the signature of the Franco-Soviet alliance in Paris and eight days before the signature of the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance in Prague. German documents also show that in late 1936, Kandelaki told Hjalmar Schacht, head of the Reichsbank, that the Soviet government had never refused political negotiations with Germany and had even made concrete proposals to improve them at the time of the negotiations for the Franco-Soviet pact—a passage that German Foreign Minister Baron Konstantin von Neurath underlined, adding a question mark. Kandelaki declared that

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38. Uldricks dismisses this testimony because it was given by lower-level Soviet functionaries, whose information was speculative and because, as defectors, they had rejected the Stalinist system, see Uldricks in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 69; and 74, note 14. For Krivitsky's account, see Walter Krivitsky, *I Was Stalin's Agent* (New York, 1940). For Stalin's reaction to the German-Soviet trade agreement, and Kandelaki bringing a draft agreement, *ibid.*, 31, 38. The book was first published in London, in 1939, titled, *In Stalin's Secret Service* (reprint, New York, 2000). The Russian translation of this edition has an extensive supplement with materials on and by Krivitsky, also documents selected and annotated by Aleksandr Kolpakidi, with photographs and short biographies of people figuring in the book, see Val'ter Krivitsky, *Ja byl agentom Stalina. Zapiski sovet'skogo razvednika* (Moscow, 1996). Walter Krivitsky (Samuel Ginsberg, 1889–1941), gave testimony to a congressional committee. He was found dead in room 532, Bellevue Hotel, Washington, D.C. on February 10, 1941, see Flora Lewis, “Who Killed Krivitsky?” *Washington Post*, 13 February 1966), reprint, Krivitsky, *In Stalin's Secret Service* (New York, 2000). Despite an alleged suicide note to Krivitsky's lawyer, it is very likely that the KGB murdered him.

39. Ambassador Schulenburg's report on his conversation with Litvinov, May 8, 1935, *DGFP*, ser. C, vol. IV, no. 78. Litvinov's mention of a German suggestion of a nonaggression pact referred to a vague German proposal made to the British government as a counter to their proposal that Germany join the proposed Eastern Security Pact, see “Communique of the Official German News Agency,” 18 April 1935, *ibid.*, no. 29.

his government was ready to enter into open or secret German-Soviet negotiations to improve mutual relations, and on "general peace." However, Hitler rejected the idea, whose time, he said, had not yet come. But he also said that once Stalin showed himself the absolute master of Russia, and especially of the military, Germany would not pass up the opportunity.<sup>40</sup> German-Soviet negotiations for a new trade-credit agreement began in December 1938, with the signature of an agreement on methods of payment. At the turn of 1938–39, the German press toned down its attacks on the USSR and the Soviet press reciprocated. Trade negotiations proceeded in January 1939, but were suspended by the Germans later that month. They were to resume once more in July 1939, and this time they would pave the way to the nonaggression pact.

How can a convincing answer be found to the question of just when Stalin decided on an agreement with Hitler? Krivitsky dated Stalin's decision as far back as the summer of 1934. However that may be, it is clear there were Soviet soundings in 1935–36, but the purpose of this paper is to examine developments during the spring and summer of 1939. The best way to proceed is to survey the available evidence, though this does not require a detailed examination of all known documents. The course of Soviet-British-French negotiations on the one hand, and of Soviet-German talks on the other, has been well known for several decades from published German and British diplomatic documents, and later from French documents. These are now supplemented by selected Russian diplomatic documents. However, a brief outline will help follow what is, after all, a very complex story.

After the Soviet proposal of a conference of interested parties in Bucharest to discuss measures of preventing further German aggression, which was rejected by Britain, and after the failed British proposal of a declaration on consultation, Britain gave Poland a guarantee of the latter's independence

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40. See Schacht letter to Von Neurath, February 6, 1936, reporting his late December 1936 conversation with Kandelaki, also Neurath to Schacht, February 11, 1937, reporting Hitler's answer, *DGFP*, C, VI (London, Washington, 1983), nos. 183, 185. Whether or not these Soviet overtures were aimed at Hitler, or at German officials interested in renewing the former Rapallo/Berlin Treaty relationship, it is now clear that Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš had nothing to do with provoking Stalin's purges of the Soviet officer corps, including Marshal Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky, by passing on a Gestapo-provided message on the marshal's alleged secret dealings with the Wehrmacht, see Igor Lukes, *Czechoslovakia Between Stalin and Hitler. The Diplomacy of Edvard Beneš in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1996), 99–107. It is likely that Stalin himself ordered his intelligence service in Germany to "leak" this message to the Gestapo, so he could use it to eliminate the popular Tukhachevsky, whom he may have seen as a rival for power.

on March 31, 1939, which was endorsed by Poland's ally France.<sup>41</sup> The unintended result was increased Soviet suspicion of both the Western powers and Poland. In the communist ideological framework, "bourgeois" states were always assumed as hostile to the world's only "socialist" state. Therefore, even before Hitler's seizure of the Czech lands in mid-March 1939, Stalin suspected the French and British of encouraging the Führer to attack the USSR. Indeed, Litvinov wrote the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan M. Maisky, that Poland would give in to Hitler's demands, perhaps in return for Lithuania, and that Chamberlain wanted a German-Soviet war to break out over the Baltic States. Litvinov also wrote Iakov E. Suritz, the Soviet ambassador in Paris: "England has in fact concluded a treaty with Poland against us."<sup>42</sup> It is clear that since Stalin controlled Soviet foreign policy, Litvinov's communications to the ambassadors reflected the Soviet leader's views. Thus, the British guarantee and then the provisional Anglo-Polish mutual assistance agreement of April 6 fueled Stalin's suspicions of a Western plot to provoke a German attack on the USSR.

Soviet negotiations with the British and French governments began in earnest in mid-April, but after the Western powers finally agreed to guarantee Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, (though not Lithuania, which did not border on the USSR and for which the latter did not demand a guarantee), negotiations bogged down over the issue of "indirect aggression." This meant the Soviet right to military intervention in these states if Moscow perceived a threat to Soviet security, and this even if the above states were not overtly threatened but changed their policy of their own volition. Stalin's fears were strengthened when Germany signed nonaggression pacts with Estonia and Latvia in June 1939. The French and British governments, for their part, opposed the Soviet definition of indirect aggression because they wished to keep the door open to a peaceful solution of the German demands on

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41. The guarantee was not Chamberlain's "spontaneous" reaction to his personal humiliation by Hitler, when the latter seized the Czech lands in mid-March 1939, nor did the prime minister fail to consult his advisers and the Foreign Office, as one historian contends, e.g. Gorodetsky, *Grand Illusion*, p. 4 and note 7. On the British road to the guarantee and its meaning, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Poland in British and French Policy in 1939: Determination to Fight or Avoid War?" *Polish Review*, vol. 34, no.3 (1989): 199–226; slightly abbreviated reprint in Patrick Finney, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, New York, Sidney and Auckland, 1997), 413–432.

42. Litvinov's letter of April 4, 1939 to Maisky on suspicions of Chamberlain's motives, and his letter of April 11 to Suritz on an Anglo-Polish treaty directed against the USSR, *SPE*, nos. 145, and 157. See also Litvinov to Stalin, 9 April 1939, in which the former denigrated French Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet's proposal for Franco-Soviet talks to clarify measures to be taken in case of a German attack on Poland, *DVP 1939 I*, no. 206.

Poland. Furthermore, Chamberlain did not want to lose the support of neutral countries, especially the United States, by sacrificing the Baltic States to the USSR. French Foreign Minister G. Bonnet, though strongly in favor of a triple alliance between London, Paris, and Moscow as a deterrent to Hitler, also opposed the Soviet demand. Nevertheless, in late July, the British and French proposed a secret protocol specifying Soviet intervention if any of these states were threatened, as Czechoslovakia had been in March 1939, but with consultation in other cases. Later, they agreed to the inclusion of this provision in the alliance treaty, and lastly to the Soviet demand for a military alliance. They decided to send a joint French-British military mission to Moscow to negotiate the alliance, assuming the political agreement would be negotiated at the same time. These negotiations began on August 12 but were suspended on August 17, allegedly over the Polish refusal to allow the passage of Soviet troops in case of war with Germany. They were finally broken off by the Soviet side on August 25, two days after the signature of the Nazi-Soviet pact. It is worth noting that France, an ally of the USSR since 1935, always showed more interest than Britain in a concrete military agreement with Moscow, as well as willingness to override Polish objections to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland. Indeed, the French premier and war minister, Edouard Daladier, gave the French government's consent to this Soviet demand on August 21, without Polish agreement. However, French offers were routinely ignored by Stalin.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, German-Soviet talks began on April 17 and, as early as May 20, Molotov indicated interest in a political agreement with Germany. The Germans, while showing much interest, were put off by Molotov's rough insistence that Berlin first fulfill all Soviet economic demands as stipulated by the commissar for foreign trade, Mikoyan. Above all, they feared that Stalin might trick them, so they suspended political talks in late June. However, they proposed conditions for a trade-credit agreement in early July, which were favorably received in Moscow. Preliminary talks began in Berlin in late July, at the same time outlining the basis for a political treaty, after which matters progressed rapidly. A trade-credit agreement was signed

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43. For a succinct presentation of French efforts to secure a separate agreement on military cooperation with the USSR, and French pressure for the conclusion of the triple alliance, see Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La Décadence 1932–1939* (Paris, 1979), ch. XIII, 405–440. For French-Polish relations in the period March–end August 1939, see Wacław Jędrzejewicz, ed., *Diplomat in Paris 1936–1939. Papers and Memoirs of Juliusz Łukasiewicz Ambassador of Poland* (New York and London, 1970), 173–271; Polish text in revised and expanded edition, Wacław Jędrzejewicz and Henryk Bułhak, eds., *Dyplomata w Paryżu 1936–1939. Wspomnienia i dokumenty Juliusza Łukasiewicza Ambasadora Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (London, 1989), pt. II, 213–322. On Daladier and Poland in late August 1939, see discussion of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, Moscow, later in this paper.



in Berlin on August 19, followed four days later by the signature of the nonaggression pact and secret protocol in Moscow.

While the parallel course of Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations and German-Soviet talks is fairly well known, this is not true of a sideline that most historians have virtually ignored. This was a series of "leaks" of Anglo-French proposals to the Soviet government, which regularly reached Berlin through the German embassy in London. They are to be found in published German documents which, in any case, are more helpful in tracing the Soviet path to the nonaggression pact than the British, French, and to some extent, the Russian documents. British historian D. C. Watt has argued persuasively that the leaks stemmed from Francis Herbert King, a paid Soviet agent in the foreign office communications department (code room). King was, indeed, in a prime position to pass summaries, or even copies, of secret British documents to the Soviet embassy in London. Whether or not he was the only person directly involved, it is clear the documents were suitably edited—most likely by an NKVD officer in the Soviet embassy—and then passed on to the German embassy, which in turn telegraphed them post haste to Berlin.<sup>44</sup> Alongside these leaks, there were also Soviet "hints" of Moscow's interest in a deal with Germany; these were made by Soviet diplomats to their foreign colleagues, and sometimes to foreign journalists.

But most important of all were the talks between the Soviet representatives and German Foreign Ministry officials in Berlin, which took place from mid-April to mid-August 1939. However, there are striking discrepancies between some of the German and Russian accounts of these conversations, and their interpretation is part of the debate on Stalin's policy in 1939. Thus, some Russian and German historians, such as Lev Bezymensky

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44. D.C. Watt, "Francis Herbert King: A Soviet Source in the Foreign Office," *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. III, no. 4 (1988), 62–82. Watt later wrote of John Herbert King, as do some other authors, but this is clearly the same person. According to another British writer: "... this monumental breach of British security actually began ten years earlier when King's fellow code clerk Andrew Oldham walked into the Soviet embassy in Paris.," John Costello, *Mask of Treachery* (New York, 1988), 347. King, a retired army captain, was an Irishman, who hated the British and needed money to support his lifestyle, see Nigel West & Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels. The British Secrets at the Heart of the KGB Archives* (New Haven and London, 1999), 286. On Ernest Holloway [not Andrew] Oldham, see *ibid.*, 286–287.

and Fleischhauer, claim that German officials who favored a return to the Rapallo/Berlin Treaty policy put statements in the mouths of Russian diplomats in Berlin so as to nudge Hitler and Ribbentrop in this direction. Indeed, Fleischhauer, who has written the most detailed account of these conversations—based mostly on German but also a few Russian archival documents—claims that the initiative for the rapprochement between Berlin and Moscow stemmed from those German Foreign Ministry officials, who wished to rein in Hitler by persuading him to sign a German-Soviet nonaggression pact, while also obtaining a Western commitment to maintain the East European status quo.<sup>45</sup> However, Russian historian S. A. Gorlov argues that a coordinated pro-Rapallo orientation among German Foreign Ministry officials—some of whom were Nazis—was unlikely, though some clearly supported a return to good German-Soviet relations. He also points out that Hitler and Stalin must be taken into account. Gorlov admits that the ground for the nonaggression pact was laid in the period between mid-April and mid-August 1939 in the talks conducted between German officials in Berlin and the Russian chargé d'affaires, Georgii A. Astakhov. What is most important, however, is Gorlov's claim that the absence of Molotov's instructions and directives to Astakhov during this crucial period proves the latter was acting on his own initiative. In support of this claim, Gorlov cites the recollection of Hans Herwarth [von Bittenfeld]. Herwarth was then first secretary in the German embassy, Moscow, and thus personal assistant to the German ambassador in Moscow, von der Schulenburg. He wrote that Astakhov was viewed both in the embassy and in the German Foreign Ministry as a bright, untypical, Soviet diplomat who had his own views and worked to restore good German-Soviet relations. Gorlov adds that Astakhov was arrested at the end of 1939 and shot in February 1940,

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45. Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 404–405. Evidently she meant the new status quo as of late fall 1938, plus some further territorial cessions to Germany. The latter, while proposed by members of the German “opposition,” were also envisaged by most German officials who wanted a rapprochement with the USSR. The proposals of the German “opposition,” as put to the British government in December 1938 by its leader Dr. Karl Goerdeler, specified that in return for their overthrowing Hitler, Germany was to regain Danzig and the Corridor, also a block of colonial territory and obtain an interest-free loan from Britain. The Under-Secretary of State for foreign affairs, Sir Alexander Cadogan, found these terms unacceptable because they were too much like Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and Britain would receive only I.O.U.s, see his diary entry for December 10, 1938, David Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M. 1938–1945* (London, 1971), 128–129.

but does not give the reasons.<sup>46</sup> Of course, if Astakhov really conducted his own independent diplomacy in Berlin between mid-April and mid-August, this would clear the Soviet government of the charge of double dealing by conducting secret talks in Berlin on the one hand, while officially negotiating with France and Britain on the other. However, aside from the well-known fact that Soviet diplomats worked under tight control from Moscow, a directive from Molotov to Astakhov in late July has been published. Also, an examination of the recorded conversations indicates that Astakhov must have been instructed to behave as if he were acting on his own in order to allow Moscow to sound out German intentions, also perhaps to provide it with an alibi should the secret conversations be discovered, or fail. Indeed, the practice of diplomats allegedly expressing their own opinions to sound out the other side is well known. Thus, in the early stages of these talks, German State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker also pretended to be expressing his “personal” views, although he was speaking according to instructions. Furthermore, the fact that no instructions or directives from Molotov before late July are included in the Russian documents published in 1990–1992, and are not accessible in Russian archives, does not prove that none was sent before late July 1939. Finally, the German officials with whom Astakhov conducted these conversations, including Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, clearly regarded him as a reliable conduit for transmitting their statements to Molotov or they would not have talked to him as they did. Of course, there were also other indicators of Soviet interest in an agreement with Germany, which could not have been made without Stalin’s knowledge and consent. These were the above mentioned “leaks” to the Germans of Franco-British proposals to Moscow, as well as “hints” given the Germans by Soviet diplomats. No such hints of a possible German-Soviet agreement were made to Britain by the Soviet side in order to propel London toward an agreement with the USSR. However, some leaks were made by the Germans to the French, presumably because, since France was an ally of Poland, French armies were expected to fight the Wehrmacht

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46. See S. A. Gorlov, “Sovetsko-germanskii dialog na kanune pakta Molotova-Ribbentropa 1939,” *Novaia i Noveishaia Istoriia*, no. 4 (1993), 13–34. For an English rendering of Herwarth’s comment on Astakhov in Berlin, 1939, see Hans von Herwarth with S. Frederck Starr, *Against Two Evils* (New York, 1981), 144. According to the Soviet diplomatic dictionary, Astakhov died in 1942; see “Georgii Timofeevich Astakhov,” in Andrei A. Gromyko et al., eds., *Diplomaticheskii Slovar*, vol. I., Moscow, 1984, 100. Hearsay has it that he was shot. Whatever the date and way of his death, it is clear he knew too much about German-Soviet talks in Berlin in summer 1939.

in the West, and also because Paris always showed more interest in a military treaty with Moscow than the British.<sup>47</sup>

As far as Anglo-Soviet negotiations are concerned, it should be noted that on April 11, Ambassador Maisky asked Foreign Secretary Viscount Halifax why, if the British and French intended to help Poland and Romania, they could not make their aid conditional on these countries' adopting a "reasonable attitude" toward accepting Russian help? Halifax replied that while such a possibility could not be excluded, this could force Poland and Romania to issue formal protests and disassociate themselves from the Western powers, with damaging effects to the common cause. He thought it was up to the Soviet government to remove Polish and Romanian suspicions. Maisky insisted that "collective security" was superior to bilateral agreements—but was reprimanded for this remark by Litvinov. Perhaps to sound out or even encourage London, on April 14, when the new British note to Moscow was ready, Maisky suddenly told Halifax that the USSR wished to play a part in aiding Romania, but first wanted to know how Britain envisaged helping that country. As for the French, they were unhappy with the British stance and took action on their own. On April 14, Foreign Minister Bonnet proposed to Soviet Ambassador Iakov Suritz a Franco-Soviet military agreement covering aid to Poland and Romania. At the same time, however, the French government supported a very different British proposal. This was communicated by Ambassador Seeds to Litvinov on April 15 in the form of an inquiry. Seeds asked whether the Soviet government could declare that it would aid any neighboring state if it was the victim of aggression, providing such a state resisted and that such aid was desired. This question came *after* the signing of the provisional Anglo-Polish mutual assistance agreement on April 6, Mussolini's invasion of Albania the next day, and Anglo-French guarantees of Romanian and Greek independence on April 13. Nevertheless, Litvinov reacted to the inquiry by telling Seeds that the British proposal would bind the Soviet government

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47. The French ambassador in Berlin, Robert Coulondre (formerly ambassador in Moscow), commented as early as May 7, 1939—four days after Litvinov's resignation—on the basis of information from General Karl Bodenschatz, who was close to Goering, that a fourth partition of Poland was to be expected. On May 24, the Quai d'Orsay noted reports that Berlin-Moscow contacts could change everything. These reports reinforced the French government in its belief that negotiations with Moscow must be concluded as soon as possible, Duroselle, *La Décadence*, 430–431. On May 30, the French ambassador in London communicated to the British a long dispatch from Coulondre reporting that Ribbentrop was pressing for an understanding with Russia, *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., vol. VI (London, 1953), no. 11, cf. *DDE*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., vol. XVI (Paris, 1983), no. 251. Coulondre continued to pass on warnings of this kind to Paris through the summer.

without committing anyone else.<sup>48</sup> As will be seen from the foreign commissar's dismissal in early May, his statement to Seeds in mid-April reflected Stalin's view rather than his own. Stalin also ignored a French proposal for a bilateral Franco-Soviet military agreement.

On April 17 Litvinov gave Seeds a detailed counterproposal which, as published Russian documents show, had been worked out with Stalin. It stipulated a military assistance agreement between France, Britain and the USSR, as well as their commitment to aid the latter's western neighbors between the Baltic and Black Seas in the event of aggression against them. Furthermore, the British government was to state that the assistance it had recently promised to Poland concerned exclusively aggression by Germany, and that the Polish-Romanian alliance was to be made operative either regarding aggression by any country—or revoked as being directed against the USSR. Furthermore, a political agreement was to be signed by the interested parties at the same time as the military agreement, and a special agreement was to be signed with Turkey. Finally, both sides would commit themselves not to sign a separate peace. The Soviet proposal seemed reasonable and comprehensive, but showed great distrust of both Britain and Poland. Indeed, the Poles were worried. British Ambassador Sir Howard Kennard reported from Warsaw that the Soviet proposals could jeopardize the possibility of Polish-Soviet cooperation, and showed Moscow's inclination to treat Poland as a pawn. He thought that since she would be in the forefront of the battle, her susceptibilities had to be borne in mind.<sup>49</sup> As for Stalin,

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48. For Maisky conversation with Halifax, April 11, see *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., vol. V, no.42, cf. *GK* 1, no.264; for Litvinov's reprimand to Maisky for speaking without instructions about collective security, thus giving the impression that bilateral agreements were not envisaged, *DVP* I, no.217. For Maisky-Halifax conversation, April 14, *SPE*, nos. 162, 163, *DVP*, *ibid.*, nos. 217, 221, also Halifax to Seeds, April 14, 1939, *DBFP*, *ibid.*, no. 166. For Bonnet's proposal of a Franco-Soviet military agreement to Suritz, April 14, *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XV (Paris, 1981), no. 387; this was presented to the British as an "annex" to the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935, see *DBFP*, *ibid.*, no.183, see also Payart conversation with Potemkin on same, April 17, Potemkin to Suritz, *DVP*, *ibid.*, no. 231, and Payart to Bonnet, April 16, *DDF* *ibid.*, no. 419. For the British proposals of April 15, see *DBFP*, *ibid.*, no. 170; for Litvinov reaction, *ibid.*, no. 182, and cf. *GK* 1, no. 271.

49. On the working out of the Soviet proposal, see Litvinov to Stalin, April 15, 17, 1939, *DVP* 1939 I, nos. 223, 224, 228, and proposals handed to ambassador Seeds, April 17, *ibid.*, no.229, also *SPE* no.171, *DiM* VII no.50, *GK* I, nos. 275, 276, *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. V, no.193. See also Litvinov to Suritz April 17, that the British guarantee to Poland could be interpreted formally as aid to the latter against the USSR, *DVP* *ibid.*, no. 230. For Kennard's comments from Warsaw, April 18, 19, see *DBFP* *ibid.*, nos. 204, 222. The Polish-Romanian alliance and secret military convention of March 3 1921, were purely defensive agreements in case of attack on their eastern frontiers, that is, by the USSR; for Polish texts see Tadeusz Jędruszcak

Russian documents do not indicate whether he expected the British government to accept his terms, or regarded them merely as a way of sounding out British intentions. It is also possible they were designed with an eye to frightening the Germans, who were to learn of the Soviet proposal when it was reported by Seeds to the Foreign Office, where John Herbert King was working in the code room.

On April 17, the same day that Litvinov handed Soviet counter-proposals to Seeds in Moscow, von Weizsäcker recorded an interesting conversation with the Soviet envoy in Berlin, Alexei F. Merekalov. The latter requested the unblocking of former Soviet orders to the Czech Škoda Works, now under German control. He also asked for the state secretary's view of Soviet-German relations. After Weizsäcker's rather general answer, in which he mentioned the improved tone of the German press toward the USSR, the Soviet envoy declared that ideological differences did not hamper Soviet-Italian relations, so he did not see any obstacles to normal Soviet-German relations. This was not the first such Soviet hint. Stalin, in his report to the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on 10 March 1939, had condemned Western appeasement of Germany and claimed the Western powers wanted to provoke a German-Soviet war, and said the USSR would not pull other people's chestnuts out of the fire. Furthermore, according to a secret German report of April 1, the Soviet Commissar for Defense, Voroshilov, told the German ambassador's wife at a Moscow reception that, in view of Western policy, he thought German-Soviet relations might be based on a different foundation. The Voroshilov and Merekalov statements look very much like a Soviet attempt to interest the Germans in a political agreement. It is worth noting that according to Astakhov's record of the Merekalov-Weizsäcker conversation, Merekalov merely asked Weizsäcker for his opinion on German-Soviet relations, to

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and Maria Nowak-Kielbikowa, eds., *Dokumenty z dziejów polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1918–1939. Tom I, 1918–1932* (Warsaw, 1989), nos. 32, 33. These treaties were revised on March 26, 1925, and later supplemented by new guarantees and technical agreements on January 15 and June 30 1931, respectively; for the texts of the first two, see nos. 75, 102, *ibid*; on the third, see second Bułhak article cited below. The revised military convention signed at this time had a clause committing both sides to mutual aid through supplies and transit in case of attack by a third country, not the USSR. However, both governments rejected British and Soviet proposals to make the treaty overtly anti-German in 1939, for fear of provoking a German attack against Poland and a Hungarian attack, supported by Germany, against Romania. (The latter declared her neutrality on September 6, 1939). On Polish-Romanian relations in the interwar period, see Henryk Bułhak, "Polska a Rumunia 1918–1939," in Janusz Żarnowski, ed., *Przyjaźń i antagonizmy. Stosunki Polski z państwami sąsiednimi w latach 1918–1939* (Wrocław, Warsaw, 1977), 305–344; for documents, see: Bułhak, "Materiały do dziejów sojuszu polsko-rumuńskiego w latach 1921–1931," *Studia Historyczne*, no. 3 (1973), 421 ff.

which the latter jokingly replied he thought there were ideological differences, but that Germany wanted to develop economic ties with the USSR.<sup>50</sup> What is one to make of the divergence between these two reports? Did Weizsäcker, who wished for a return to the good German-Soviet relations of the Rapallo era, put words in Merekalov's mouth to nudge Hitler and Ribbentrop toward a German-Soviet agreement? Or did Astakhov omit Merekalov's statement in order to conceal a Soviet initiative? The answer to this question may lie in some document still inaccessible in the Russian archives.

Whatever the case may be, two days later, on April 19, the German embassy in London reported "from a reliable source" the contents of the Anglo-French proposals to the Soviet government as presented by Seeds to Litvinov on April 15. The "reliable source" stated that the Baltic States were also envisaged in these proposals, and reported the Soviet question whether the proposed Anglo-French guarantee was to cover only Poland and Romania, or the Baltic States as well. The "reliable source" also mentioned that the Soviet ambassador in Paris, Suritz, had said the Soviet Union was ready to guarantee Romanian possession of Bessarabia, while Deputy Foreign Commissar Vladimir P. Potemkin told the French ambassador in Moscow [Émile Naggiar] that the Soviet government had not yet made up its mind on the matter.<sup>51</sup> The alleged Soviet statement on Bessarabia may have been inserted due to some French rumors, for it is not confirmed by any known French or Soviet document. On the contrary, Potemkin told Payart on April 16 that the Soviet government had not promised any aid to Romania if the latter was the object of aggression, and that such a view could only be a misunderstanding. He added that the Romanian attitude toward the USSR was evasive.<sup>52</sup> It is also possible that the misinformation on Bessarabia was meant to frighten the Germans with the possibility of an imminent Soviet-Western agreement, while the alleged express Soviet question on the Baltic States looks like a Soviet hint to Berlin of Moscow's

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50. See Weizsäcker report on conversation with Merekalov, April 17, 1939, *DGFP* D VI, no. 215; for Astakhov's version of the Merekalov-Weizsäcker conversation, see *DVP* 1939, I, no. 236. For excerpts from Stalin's report of 10 March 1939, see Degras, *DSFP*, III, 315–322. For Voroshilov's remarks to Mrs. von der Schulenburg, see Secret Report, Berlin, April 1, 1939, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin, Dienststelle Ribbentrop, Vertrauliche Berichte, Bd. 2, 1939, 293. The document was found in the German archives by Dr. Stanisław Żerko of the Instytut Zachodni, Poznań. The author wishes to thank Dr. Richard Raack, professor emeritus of the University of California at Davis, for making the document available to her.

51. Chargé d'Affaires [Theo Kordt] London, to Foreign Ministry, Berlin, April 19, 1939, *DGFP*, D, VI, no. 233.

52. See Potemkin to Suritz, April 17, 1939, *DVP* 1939, no. 231, and Payart on same, *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. vol. XVI, no. 418.

interest in the region. In any case, the German embassy in London used the “reliable source” to inform the German Foreign Ministry about Western proposals at every stage of the negotiations, except for three weeks after July 22. It is likely that the good progress in direct German-Soviet talks in Berlin at that time made such reports unnecessary.

In early May came the astonishing news of the resignation of Litvinov as commissar for foreign affairs—an event closely connected with the dating of Stalin’s decision to throw in his hand with Hitler. If the “Vozhd” had not done this much earlier in 1934–36—as per Krivitsky—he could, as mentioned earlier, have made up his mind when he sacked Litvinov. The latter was forced to resign on May 3, allegedly because of his “disloyalty” to Molotov, then head of the Sovnarkom. There is no documented explanation of what this “disloyalty” meant, but it is known that Litvinov never got on with Molotov, and that the latter shouted at him in Stalin’s Kremlin office on the day of his dismissal. It is likely that Litvinov’s persistence in advocating a compromise between Soviet and British proposals, and especially his suggestion that Moscow give up its demand for British agreement to Soviet guarantees of aid to Poland and Romania—i.e., that France and Britain would force them to accept such aid—was held against him. Indeed, many years later, in 1987, former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko claimed that Litvinov had been relieved of his post because he had gone against the party line. As Gromyko then said : “ . . . *he was against shifting our focus from England and France to Germany, and so he was fired.*” Furthermore, on May 5, 1939, Astakhov told a French journalist in Berlin that Litvinov’s dismissal did not mean a change of Soviet policy, but signaled the Soviet government’s reaction to the ambivalent policy of the Western powers, which downplayed the political and military value of the aid that the USSR was ready to give them. It is also known that the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs was thoroughly purged, though Litvinov was spared to await a better day. (He was the Soviet ambassador to the United States in 1941–43). As mentioned earlier, some historians believe Litvinov’s dismissal marks the moment that Stalin decided to work for an agreement with Hitler—a view also expressed by some contemporary observers of international affairs and by some diplomats, including the French ambassador in Rome, François Poncet.<sup>53</sup> Gromyko’s 1987 statement con-

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53. In one of Litvinov’s last notes to Stalin, dated May 3, 1939, he criticized British delays in answering the Soviet proposals of April 17; suggested insisting on the inclusion of the eastern Baltic States [Finland, Latvia, Estonia], but said that Poland and Romania were already sufficiently protected by British and French commitments. Thus, it seems Litvinov thought the USSR should not insist on giving its own guarantee to these states. He also proposed agreement to the British demand for the inclusion of Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland in the guarantees; see *DVP*



firms the view that Litvinov's dismissal in early May 1939, if not earlier, indicates Stalin had made up his mind at this time to strike a deal with Hitler rather than with France and Britain.

Indeed, German-Soviet relations began to warm up immediately. On May 5, Julius Schnurre, head of Department W IV (Economic Department, Eastern Europe) in the German Foreign Ministry, recorded a conversation with Astakhov. On learning that Soviet orders to the Škoda Works in German-occupied Bohemia would be filled, Astakhov asked Schnurre whether German-Soviet economic negotiations could be renewed, to which Schnurre said he would soon give him an answer. Astakhov then asked whether the Germans thought that Litvinov's replacement by Molotov meant a shift in Soviet policy toward Germany. He went on to say that though Molotov had no experience in foreign policy, he would have a significant impact on it.<sup>54</sup> It is curious that the only Russian record of this conversation is a telegram from Merekalov to Molotov of May 5, reporting that Schnurre had invited him to call, told him that the Soviet order to the Škoda Works would be filled, and that no obstacles were expected. It is also worth noting in connection with Astakhov's question on the renewal of economic negotiations, that in early January 1939, Merekalov had insisted to Schnurre

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(note 53 continued) 1939, I, no. 267. For Gromyko's statement, made at a Politburo meeting in 1987, see Anatoly Chernaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, translated and edited by Robert English and Elizabeth Tucker (University Park, PA, 2000), 126, emphasis added A.M.C.). Maisky wrote that Litvinov's resignation was preceded by "a war of words" between Molotov and Litvinov in Stalin's Kremlin office. Furthermore, a former Soviet diplomat, Evgeny Gnedin, claimed that long before this time, the NKVD had been preparing a "case" against Litvinov. See Sokolov, "People's Commissar Maxim Litvinov," 103 (For Sokolov, see note 14 above). See also Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East, 1933–1941* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1992), 129, and Haslam, note 14 above. An enlarged "Stalin Cabinet" met on May 3; the record shows that Molotov was there from 3 to 7.50 p.m., while Litvinov came in at 5.15 and left at 5.50 p.m.; see *IA* 1995 no. 5–6, 36. Stalin's terse telegram to Soviet envoys on Litvinov's resignation and his replacement by Molotov mentioned a serious conflict between Molotov and Litvinov stemming from the latter's "disloyal attitude" toward the Sovnarkom, see *DVP*, *ibid.*, no. 269. On Astakhov's remarks to a French journalist in Berlin, see Coulondre to Bonnet, May 5, 1939, *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., vol. XVI, no. 71. Astakhov must have been acting on instructions, since Merekalov had asked on May 4 for directives on what to say about Litvinov's dismissal, see *DVP* *ibid.*, no. 276. The French ambassador in Rome, François Poncet, told his British colleague, Sir Percy Lorraine, that he believed Stalin sacked Litvinov "to make an arrangement with Germany, which would enable the latter to attack Poland and retake the Corridor with relative impunity." Lorraine to Halifax, Rome, May 5, 1939, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. V, no. 372.

54. For Schnurre's record of the conversation with Astakhov, May 5, 1939, see *DGFP*, D, VI, no. 332.

on their renewal. In December 1938, the Germans had offered Moscow a credit line of two hundred million reichsmarks (RM) in return for Russian raw materials, and Schnurre was to go to Moscow as the German negotiator. However, the Germans canceled the negotiations, allegedly because of French press reports.<sup>55</sup> As will be seen later, Stalin and Molotov resented this cancellation.

The international background to the next Astakhov-Schnurre meeting (May 17) was a new version of the previous British proposal (April 17). Presented by Ambassador Seeds to Molotov on May 8, it requested a public Soviet declaration that the USSR would aid certain East European countries in case of aggression—but only after Britain and France had become involved. This was reminiscent of the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance of May 1935, which stipulated Soviet aid only after France acted to aid Czechoslovakia. (The stipulation was inserted by President Edward Beneš). The revised Anglo-French proposal—consulted on with the Poles—was more forthcoming than the first version, but Stalin and Molotov saw it as a request for one-sided Soviet aid to be given Poland and Romania for free, that is, without any compensation to the USSR. Still, Molotov asked Ambassadors Suritz and Maisky for their views on what answer should be given, and both advised that negotiations be continued. Whether or not Molotov was influenced by this advice, on May 14 he handed Seeds the Soviet reply listing three basic Soviet conditions for constructing a barrier against further aggression in Europe: (1) an effective mutual assistance pact between England, France, and the USSR; (2) their guarantee of Central and East European states threatened by aggression, including Latvia, Estonia, and Finland; (3) agreement by the three powers on the extent of material assistance to be rendered to each other and to the guaranteed states.<sup>56</sup> This

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55. Merekalov to Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, May 5, 1939, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 280. On the German offer of December 1938 and postponement of Schnurre trip, see *DGFP* D IV (London and Washington, 1951), nos. 484, 487. The German credit offer of December 1938 was for the same sum as in the German-Soviet trade agreement of April 1935; see note 34 above.

56. For the Anglo-French proposal of May 8, see *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. V, p.487; *SPE*, no.205, GK 1, no.327. On Anglo-Polish consultations on same, see Ambassador Edward Raczynski's cipher telegrams to Polish Foreign Ministry of April 20, May 3, 1939, Polish Embassy London, A.12, Ciphers, *PISM*, also Raczynski report to Beck, April 26, *DiM* VII, no. 55; for Halifax to Kennard, April 28, and Kennard to Halifax, *DBFP*, *ibid.*, nos. 304, 319. For Molotov's telegram to Suritz, May 8, see *DVP* 1939 I, no. 284; extract, *SPE* no. 206; see also TASS communiqué of May 10, 1939, criticizing the English proposal as allegedly reported by Reuters, *ibid.*, no. 208. Maisky thought the English proposal was unacceptable, but that London had not said its last word, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 290. Suritz wrote Molotov on May 10 advising acceptance of the English proposal, because this would show the Soviet Union was not playing a double game with Germany, would gain the support of

project did not include Lithuania, which did not border on the USSR, and which Moscow perhaps expected to be defended by Poland. Whatever the case may be, in mid-April 1939, Major Korotkikh, the Soviet military attaché in Kaunas, told his Polish counterpart that the Soviet government considered the Baltic to lie in the sphere of Polish interests and that if Lithuania or any other Baltic state declared for Germany, the neighboring states would have to enter their territory in order to prevent German domination there. This seems to have been a low-level sounding of the Polish position on Lithuania, and, of course, Polish reaction to a possible Soviet entry into the other Baltic States. The Polish minister to Lithuania, Franciszek Charwat, did not mention Korotkikh's *démarche* when speaking to the Polish Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Jan Szembek, on 25 April 1939. But he did emphasize German economic pressure on Lithuania, and said he thought Poland should conduct an anti-German policy there.<sup>57</sup>

Three days later, on May 17, Astakhov saw Schnurre again. According to the German record, Astakhov requested that the Soviet Trade Office in Prague remain there as a branch of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin. He then remarked on the improvement of the German press tone toward the USSR, and went on to say that since there were no outstanding differences between German and Soviet policies, there was no basis for hostility between the two countries. It was true, he said, that the USSR felt threatened by Germany, but this fear could be removed—and in this context he mentioned the Rapallo Treaty. To a question by Schnurre on Anglo-Soviet negotiations, Astakhov said he did not think Britain would attain her goal. He then expatiated on the good Soviet-Italian relations, noting the Duce's statement that, despite the [forthcoming] establishment of the [German-Italian] Axis, nothing stood in the way of further developing political and economic relations with the USSR. All this is, however, missing from Astakhov's short telegram reporting the same conversation.<sup>58</sup>

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(note 56 continued) majority French opinion, and prevent Chamberlain from "wriggling" out again in Parliament; *ibid.*, no.296. For the Soviet counterproposal of May 15, see *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. V, no. 520; *SPE*, no.213; *GK I*, no. 342.

57. On Major Korotkikh's statement to Col. Leon Mitkiewicz, see Polish Envoy to Lithuania, Franciszek Charwat, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 18, 1939, *DiM VII*, no. 51; for his talk with Jan Szembek, 25 April 1939, Szembek, *Diariusz*, IV, 573.

58. Schnurre's report on the conversation with Astakhov, May 17, 1939, *DGFP D*, VI, no. 406; Astakhov's telegram to National Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, May 17, on conversation with Schnurre, *GK I*, no. 349, *DVP* 1939, I, no. 318. The German-Italian Axis agreement was signed on May 22. What Astakhov was to say to Schnurre, May 17, may have been discussed at a meeting of the Stalin Cabinet two days earlier. On May 15, Molotov, Andrei Zhdanov, head of the Leningrad Party Organization, Andrei A. Andreev, chairman of the Central Committee Control Commission, and Georgii M. Malenkov, head of the central committee depart-

It is worth noting Schnurre's record of Astakhov's reference to the Rapallo Treaty of 1922, which normalized German-Soviet relations and led to secret military cooperation. Furthermore, Schnurre's record of Astakhov's statement on good Soviet-Italian relations was in line with those made by Merekalov in early January to Ambassador Schulenburg, when the latter was in Berlin, and to Weizsäcker on April 17. After Merekalov's departure for Moscow sometime in May, Astakhov carried on conversations with Schnurre. In fact, it is clear that the Astakhov-Schnurre conversation of May 17 prepared the ground for Molotov's declaration to Schulenburg in Moscow three days later. In this instance, both German and Russian records report the commissar's declaration that Soviet-German trade-credit negotiations could continue, *but that a "political basis" had to be established first*, though Molotov refused to say what this would be.<sup>59</sup> Hitler and Ribbentrop at first wanted to take up the Molotov proposal but then decided to wait, fearing the Russians might trick them. Instead, they decided on a cautious exploration of the possibility of better relations, a task they entrusted to Weizsäcker, who was to speak to Astakhov as if expressing his own opinions.<sup>60</sup>

In the meanwhile, Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations showed no progress. Neither Molotov nor Potemkin attended the May session of the League of Nations, though Halifax had expressed the hope of discussing the subject with one or the other. Instead, Maisky traveled to Geneva to be on hand, but does not seem to have been consulted. The British Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee met to discuss the matter on May 19, before Halifax's departure. They agreed that a close alliance with Russia, as proposed by the French, was not desirable, though the Secretary for Home Affairs, Sir Samuel Hoare, said failure to get an arrangement with Russia would mean the failure of the "peace front." Chamberlain, however, noted that both

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ment dealing with senior cadres, were with Stalin for about two hours each, while Molotov stayed from 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. See *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 36. On May 17, after the Astakhov-Schnurre conversation, Molotov met with Stalin from 7–10 p.m., while Marshal Kliment Y. Voroshilov, defense commissar, and Deputy Foreign Commissar Potemkin were there between 7:30 and 9:45 p.m.; they were followed by Lavrenty P. Beria, commissar for national security (NKVD), Malenkov, Potemkin—again—and third Deputy Foreign Commissar Vladimir I. Dekanozov; *ibid.*, 38.

59. Emphasis added, A.M.C. For Schulenburg's report on the conversation with Molotov of May 20, 1939, see *DGFP D*, VI, no. 424; Russian record, *GK I*, no. 352 and *DVP* 1939 I, no. 326. On May 19, Molotov met with Stalin from 6:35–11:50 p.m., while Zhdanov, Andreev, and Malenkov were there 6:40–8:05 p.m., followed by Mikoyan, 7:10–8:05 p.m.. Nikolai I. Sharonov—the newly appointed ambassador to Poland—was there from 8:45–11:50 p.m.; others were also present; see *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 38.

60. *DGFP D*, VI, nos. 414, 437, 441.

the Polish and Romanian ambassadors had said in private conversations with Halifax and himself that any close association between Britain and Russia would also mean their countries' association with Moscow, which would in itself precipitate a European war. He also reminded the committee that there were still important "moderate elements" in Germany, whom a Western alliance with Russia would drive into Hitler's camp.<sup>61</sup> Chamberlain may have had the German "opposition" in mind, but he was clearly unaware of the Rapallo supporters in Berlin. Still, he was right about the Romanians and the Poles. Indeed, the Polish foreign minister gave British Ambassador Kennard his comments and suggestions on May 22. Having already made his position clear to Moscow on May 10–11, Beck emphasized three points to the British: (1) It seemed people in Paris and London did not realize that Russia and Germany had no common frontier; (2) Polish-Russian relations must be reciprocal, so Poland cannot be the object of any agreement made between other states; (3) The projected [Franco-British] agreement [with the USSR] envisioned war and was perhaps good and useful in such a case. However, if there was no war and France and Britain wished to organize Europe on peaceful principles, the Soviet alliance would make conversations with Berlin difficult, while at the same time British policy would be unpopular in some of the states of Central, Northern, and Eastern Europe. Beck concluded by saying that his comments were not motivated by the desire to hamper British and French freedom of action in matters not engaging Poland, for every state had the right to conclude defensive alliances.<sup>62</sup>

The British government kept Polish views in mind, but only as long as they did not interfere with its policy goals—or run counter to public opinion at home. In fact, by late May, public opinion in both Britain and France was calling for an alliance with Moscow and the two governments had to take this into account. Thus, French and British statesmen worked out a joint proposal, presented by Seeds and Payart to Potemkin on May 25. It envisaged a tripartite pact, though without a guarantee of the Baltic States. Furthermore, it proposed the discredited article 16 of the League Covenant as the basis for mutual aid, an idea that appealed greatly to Chamberlain. Molotov criticized the Western proposals to French and British diplomats

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61. On Cabinet discussion before Halifax's departure for Geneva, see Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee (36) 48<sup>th</sup> meeting, Friday, May 19, 1939, CAB 27/625, 62–68, Public Record Office, London, [henceforth: PRO]. For the Franco-British talks in Geneva on the new proposal to the USSR, see *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. V, nos. 576, 578; Foreign Office memo on the pros and cons of an alliance, *ibid.*, no. 589.

62. For Polish views and objections, see Kennard's report on conversation with Beck to Under-Secretary of State Alexander Cadogan, May 22, 1939, *DBFP* *ibid.*, nos. 586, 649; for Polish record of same, see GMM 396/WB/9, Polish embassy London, A.12, *PISM*.

in Moscow on May 27, and did so publicly in a speech to the Supreme Soviet on May 31. On the same day, Molotov presented the Soviet counter-proposals, with critical remarks on the Anglo-French proposal. He named eight states to be defended, including the Baltic States, and demanded that military and political agreements be signed at the same time. On June 6, Halifax wrote the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps: "The Russian business is quite infuriating, it blocks everything and frays everybody's nerves." Still, he hoped it would bring results soon.<sup>63</sup>

It is against this background that one should view an important conversation which took place in Berlin on May 30 between Weizsäcker and Astakhov. German historian Fleischhauer sees Weizsäcker's account of it as marking "the first German initiative." This is true, but it was also a reaction to Molotov's proposal of a political agreement made to Schulenburg on May 20. Weizsäcker—acting on instructions but pretending to express only his own views—reported that he asked Astakhov whether the request to make the Soviet Trade Office in Prague a branch of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin was meant to lead to a provisional or a longer arrangement. Astakhov answered it was the latter. *He then stated that he was informed of the Molotov-Schulenburg conversation.* He said the Soviet side

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63. For the Franco-British proposal presented to Molotov on May 25, see *SPE*, nos. 229, 230 and *DBFP*, no.649, 679–80, Russian: *GK* 1, nos. 379,380, *DVP* 1939, no.339. Article 16 mandated League members' severance of relations with an aggressor and foresaw financial and economic sanctions against him; also the League Council was to recommend what military action should be contributed by member countries. The article was not invoked against Japan after the latter's aggression against China, nor against Germany after the annexation of Austria and the Czech lands. Economic sanctions failed to stop Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia, and were not invoked against him when he invaded Albania in April 1939. For French support of an alliance with the USSR, see *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVI, no.289, also Suritz report of May 24 that the French General Staff, especially Generals Maurice Gamelin and Maxime Weygand, pressed for an alliance and military agreement with the USSR, see *DVP* *ibid.*, no. 331. For Potemkin-Seeds conversation, May 25, see *DVP* *ibid.*, no.333; for Molotov-Seeds-Payart conversation May 27, see *DBFP* *ibid.*, no. 648, 657, *GK* 1, no.379, and *DVP* *ibid.*, no.339. For Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet, May 31, 1939, see *SPE*, no. 232, Degras, *SDFP* III, 332–340; for the Soviet draft proposal of June 2, see *ibid.*, 340–41, also *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser.V, p.753, *SPE* no. 233. On Russian business "infuriating," see Halifax to Phipps, June 6, 1939, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI, no.272. There was a meeting of the "Stalin Cabinet" on the night of June 1–2, at which both political and military matters seem to have been discussed. Molotov stayed from 6:10 p.m.–2:50 a.m. and Voroshilov 7:40–2:50 a.m.; the chief of the general staff, Army Commander [later General] Boris Shaposhnikov, attended 11:45–2:50 a.m.; Andreev and Zhdanov stayed from a few minutes after 10 p.m. to 2:50 a.m., and Mikoyan attended, 10 p.m.–1:30 a.m., *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 38.

did not see economic negotiations as a “game,” and cited Molotov as saying that economics and politics could not be separated in German-Soviet relations. He added that Potemkin had “apparently” told the German economic attaché in Moscow [Gustav Hilger] that the planned economic negotiations should not be a game. Weizsäcker, for his part, hinted that Germany had much to offer the USSR, to which Astakhov responded that *the German government had rejected a Soviet offer of alliance before concluding a treaty with Poland*, also that Germany had showed little understanding for the Soviet view that domestic and foreign policy need not conflict with each other. Weizsäcker then noted Astakhov’s statement that he would ask Moscow again for its views about the branch Soviet Trade Office in Prague, also for information on what exactly Molotov had wished to tell Ambassador Schulenburg. Astakhov added that, despite mistrust of Germany, Molotov did not wish to shut the door to further German-Soviet discussions.<sup>64</sup>

Astakhov’s record generally agrees with Weizsäcker’s, but gives a somewhat different presentation. In mentioning Molotov’s declaration to Schulenburg, Weizsäcker allegedly said this was different from what Merekalov had told the Foreign Ministry; that is, that economic relations could develop separately from political ones. To this Astakhov answered that he was familiar only with part of Molotov’s conversation with Schulenburg and could not give a definite interpretation of the commissar’s declaration. However, he had no grounds to believe that Molotov was definitely opposed to Schnurre’s trip to Moscow and to economic negotiations. He would ask the “Center” about this and then give a clarification. At the same time, he recalled that Merekalov had often stated in conversations with Weizsäcker that “economics is condensed politics.” He also recalled that at a breakfast given by Merekalov for Schulenburg, the latter had agreed that an improvement in political relations could follow improved economic relations. Astakhov then went on to recount Weizsäcker’s “personal” statements, noting he could not render them precisely due to

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64. Memorandum by Weizsäcker, May 30, 1939, *DGFP D VI*, no. 451, emphasis added, A.M.C. There is no published record of the Potemkin-Hilger conversation. On May 29, Ribbentrop told Italian Ambassador Bernardo Attolico that Weizsäcker was to speak to the Russian chargé in Berlin, rather than Schulenburg to Molotov in Moscow. He asked Attolico not to inform Italian foreign minister just yet, because he had not yet fully clarified his own thoughts, but Attolico immediately informed Ciano, see *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* [henceforth: *DDI*], 8<sup>th</sup> ser. vol. XII (Rome, 1952), no. 53. Likewise, a member of the Italian embassy in Berlin told one of French Ambassador Coulondre’s informants that advances, or at least soundings, were made recently by the Axis powers directly or indirectly to the Kremlin. The Italian diplomat said Ribbentrop would march with the Soviets, but they were turning a deaf ear, see Coulondre telegram to Bonnet, June 1, 1939, *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVI no. 329.

the camouflaged and contorted manner in which they were made. The main points were—and here Astakhov's account agrees with Weizsäcker's—that Hitler had given up any designs on Ukraine, giving as an example the fate of Carpathian Ukraine. Also, Weizsäcker pointed out that Hitler had not made any negative comments on the USSR in his speech of April 28, when he denounced both the German-Polish nonaggression agreement of 1934 and the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935. Weizsäcker said it was now up to the USSR to choose between England and Germany. Astakhov reported that he replied, also informally, by pointing out past German anti-Soviet policy, good Soviet-Italian relations, also the fact that the Soviet Union had always desired good relations with Germany. Here *he recalled that just before the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet and Czechoslovak-Soviet pacts, the Soviet government had proposed mutual assistance pacts to Germany and Poland.* To this Weizsäcker said: "I did not know this," as if catching himself unawares. Astakhov then asked about the significance of the rumors flying around Berlin about a German-Soviet agreement, but did not record an answer. Finally, he told Weizsäcker he would forward his questions to Moscow, while his account of the rest of the conversation would be presented as unofficial statements.<sup>65</sup>

Two aspects of this conversation, present in both records, are significant. First of all, Astakhov indicated that he had been informed of at least part of the Molotov-Schulenburg conversation of May 20, and mentioned a conversation between Potemkin and Hilger, saying he would contact Moscow to clarify certain points. Thus, it is clear that he could hardly have been acting on his own initiative. Secondly, he mentioned Soviet offers of mutual assistance pacts to Germany and Poland, made according to Weizsäcker's account, before the German-Polish treaty [January 1934], but according to Astakhov, just before the conclusion of Soviet alliances with France and Czechoslovakia in [May] 1935. There is no record of such a Soviet proposal to Poland, but proposals to Germany at this time were also mentioned by Kandelaki in his Berlin conversations at the turn of 1936–37.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps both Kandelaki and Astakhov referred to the suggestion Litvinov made to Schulenburg on May 8, 1935, to start negotiations for a nonaggression pact, or there may have been some other "concrete" proposal,

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65. See Astakhov record of conversation with Weizsäcker, May 30, 1939, GK I, no. 384 (emphasis added, A.M.C), and his telegram to Foreign Affairs Commissariat, May 30, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 342. The Carpathian Ukraine was part of Austria-Hungary before 1918 and then of Czechoslovakia. It had been viewed as a potential German bridge to Soviet Ukraine, but part of it was awarded to Hungary by the Vienna Accord of 1 November 1938, and the rest in late March 1939, see Paul Robert Magocsi. *Historical Atlas of East Central Europe* (Seattle and London, 1993, reprint 1994), map 39c, 132–133.

66. On Kandelaki, see note 40 above.



the trace of which has been lost. Whatever the case may be, Astakhov's reference to a previous Soviet proposal of a mutual assistance pact to Germany in 1935 looks very much like a calculated hint directed at Hitler and Ribbentrop through Weizsäcker, who certainly favored a return to Rapallo but did not make German policy.

While the Germans were cautious, the Soviets were not shy about dropping hints. Thus, on June 3, Weizsäcker noted a conversation with the Estonian minister in Berlin. The latter, known as a good judge of Russian affairs, said he thought the Russians viewed the democratic states with greater mistrust than totalitarian ones. Also, he had the impression from speaking to the Russian chargé d'affaires that the Russians were only waiting for "a friendly gesture" to say so.<sup>67</sup> Twelve days later, on June 15, Ernst Woermann, the Nazi head of the Political Department in the German Foreign Ministry, recorded some very striking statements by Astakhov, as reported by the Bulgarian minister in Berlin [Parvan Draganov]. According to the latter, the Soviet diplomat stated the Soviet Union had three choices: a pact with Britain and France, further delaying those negotiations, or a nonaggression pact with Germany. Astakhov said the third option was the most desirable for the USSR, and that different "world views" did not have to play any role. He also said the USSR did not recognize Romanian possession of Bessarabia and feared a German occupation of the Baltic States. *If, however, Germany made it clear that she would not attack the Soviet Union, the latter would abstain from concluding a pact with the Western powers—but the Soviets did not know what Germany wanted.*<sup>68</sup> Gorlov admits that Draganov, in a report to the Bulgarian foreign office, confirmed these statements were made by Astakhov, but the Russian historian gives credence to the Soviet diplomat, who in his "Dairy" [sic] presented the statements attributed to him by Draganov—as made to him by the latter. Gorlov also notes there is a detailed, four-page unpublished report by Astakhov on this conversation in the Russian archives, but does not say when it was received by Molotov.<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Roberts also points out the discrepancy between the Draganov and Astakhov accounts, but speculates

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67. Weizsäcker note, June 3, 1939, *DGFP D VI*, no. 469; Karl Tofer was the Estonian minister in Berlin.

68. Ernst Woermann's record of a conversation with the Bulgarian minister, June 15, 1939, *DGFP D VI*, no. 529; emphasis added, A.M.C.

69. Gorlov, "Sovetsko-germanskii dialog," 21–23 (see note 46 above), and Astakhov's diary entry for June 14, 1939, *GK 2*, no. 403. Astakhov's detailed report on the conversation, cited by Gorlov as f. 011, op. 4, p. 27, d. 59, 123–127, Foreign Policy Archives, Moscow, was not published in *DVP 1939 I*. Instead, there is a political report by Astakhov to Molotov, dated June 14, beginning with the words: "The last few days here passed without any special events," see *ibid.*, no. 370.

that Astakhov made the statements on his own initiative, so they could be seen as “an instance of personal kite flying.” Roberts admits that Astakhov had asked Molotov for instructions on how to answer persistent questions put to him on Soviet policy, but concludes that Astakhov might have sounded out Draganov on his own initiative.<sup>70</sup> Neither Gorlov nor Roberts is willing to entertain the possibility that Astakhov had been instructed to “fish” for German proposals, though given the Stalin-Molotov control of Soviet diplomacy, this must have been the case.

Furthermore, the Germans did not treat Astakhov as a free lance agent but as a bona fide Soviet representative, whom they expected to transmit their statements to Molotov. Weizsäcker had done this on May 30. The next to do so was Schulenburg, who was instructed to follow up on the Draganov report. During a brief stay in Berlin, the ambassador visited Astakhov on June 17, and told him there were no serious problems between Germany and the Soviet Union. Schulenburg reported Astakhov’s claim that Weizsäcker’s statements were rather general and vague, noting the Soviet diplomat had said the same to the Bulgarian minister, probably a reference to Astakhov’s statement to Draganov that the Soviet Union did not know what Germany wanted. The ambassador denied this, and *repeated the statement, made to him personally by Ribbentrop, that Germany did not fear England and France, because she had a strong line of fortifications, but “an agreement with Russia makes sense.”* Schulenburg also reported Astakhov as saying that things had gone well for Germany and Russia when they were friends, and badly when they were not. The ambassador, for his part, said that Germany had experienced difficulties in fulfilling Mikoyan’s “A and B programs” [Soviet demands in the projected trade agreement] because of her own needs, but that the situation had improved after the “union” with Czechoslovakia. This was clearly a hint that Germany would welcome the renewal of German-Soviet trade-credit negotiations. Astakhov’s account of this conversation is generally in keeping with Schulenburg’s, except for his statement on German-Russian relations as reported by the German ambassador.<sup>71</sup>

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70. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War*, 78.

71. Schulenburg account, June 17, DGFP D, VI, no. 540, emphasis added, A.M.C.; Astakhov account, DVP 1939 I, no. 378. Mikoyan’s A and B programs referred to 1938 Soviet demands for German manufactured goods, especially armaments; for these programs and German deliveries to the USSR as agreed on 19 August 1939, see GK 2, no. 575, 284–285; for the C program (list) of Soviet deliveries to Germany, not published in GK 2, see Zorya and Lebedeva, “Around the Non-Aggression Pact,” *International Affairs*, no. 10 (1989), 101. Timber led the way, followed by agricultural goods and phosphates, but raw cotton, manganese ore, gas oil, and other goods were also included. See also note 126 below.

In the meanwhile, Anglo-Soviet negotiations were stalemated because, as Seeds was informed from London on June 12, the British government could not agree that guarantees be imposed on states unwilling to receive them. Indeed, like Poland and Romania, the Baltic States did not want to be guaranteed by the USSR, while the latter insisted that their security must be guaranteed. On June 13, a *Pravda* editorial written by Zhdanov expatiated on the need to defend the Baltic States [Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, but not Lithuania] against aggression. Seeds was to have traveled to London for consultations but came down with flu, so Robert Strang, a high official in the Foreign Office, left London for Moscow on June 14 with a new set of proposals.<sup>72</sup> Seeds handed them to Molotov on June 15. They provided for consultation in case of a threat to one of the states envisaged, but still included article 16 of the League Covenant as the basis for aid. Molotov rejected the proposal the next day, insisting on the inclusion of the three Baltic States and full reciprocity. By this time, Chamberlain and the cabinet, as well as most British officials and diplomats, saw an alliance with the USSR as necessary, if only to prevent a German-Soviet pact. At a meeting of the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee on June 20, Lord Chatfield, the minister for Coordination of Defense, said a treaty of mutual defense with Russia would at least prevent the Soviets from making a pact with Germany. *Halifax agreed, but said that if Germany invaded Poland, nothing could prevent a Soviet-German arrangement to partition that country.*<sup>73</sup> There were, of course, some British officials and diplomats who still opposed an agreement with Moscow. Sir Nevile Henderson, the pro-German British ambassador in Berlin, wrote Halifax on June 17 that he was uneasy about the negotiations with the Russians because: "History contains nothing but examples of the unwisdom of putting one's faith in the Slavs; they have always and invariably proved a bitter disappointment to their allies from the days of Maria Theresa to 1917." This diatribe earned an ironic marginal comment from one Foreign Office reader: "What about 1812–1815?"<sup>74</sup>

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72. Foreign Office Memorandum: "Instructions for Sir William Seeds, June 12, 1939," *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. v. VI, no. 35. Robert Strang was head of the Central Department, Foreign Office, 1937–39, and assistant under-secretary of state, 1939–43.

73. For the British proposal and Molotov reply, June 15, 16, see *SPE*, nos. 245–246; *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI, nos. 73, 103, 122, 123; Zhdanov article of June 13, Franco-British proposals and Molotov rejection, *GK* 2, no. 401, 404, 406, 407; *DVP* 1939 I no. 373. The visitor record for the "Stalin Cabinet" on June 15, shows Molotov; Voroshilov; Andreev; Nikolai M. Shvernik, president of the Trade Union Federation; Kaganovich, Mikoyan, and Beria. Molotov stayed the longest, 11:10 p.m.–3:10 a.m., see *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 40. For the British cabinet meeting of June 20, see *CAB*. 27/626, 39, *PRO*, emphasis added, A.M.C.

74. For N. Henderson to Halifax, June 17, and marginal comment, F.O. 800.315, 217, *PRO*.

On the Berlin-Moscow sector, the Germans were still cautious, while the Russians insisted on their economic demands. Schulenburg told Molotov on June 28, that he was instructed by Ribbentrop to say Germany desired not only a normalization but also an improvement of mutual relations, and that this was approved by Hitler. Molotov, however, replied that it would be better for the German embassy to answer Mikoyan's questions [regarding a trade-credit agreement], and only then would a decision be made as to whether Schnurre should come to Moscow.<sup>75</sup> Molotov's arrogant stance, confirmed by Potemkin in a conversation with Schulenburg on July 1,<sup>76</sup> led to the suspension of German probing and thus the interruption of German-Soviet diplomatic conversations in both Moscow and Berlin. However, presumably to encourage the Germans, the Russian air attaché in London, Ivan Cherny, told the assistant German air attaché that the Soviet government had no interest in concluding a pact with Britain and France. In a telegram of June 29 reporting this item, the German ambassador in London, Herbert von Dirksen, also transmitted the correct version of the proposal sent that day to the British ambassador in Moscow. He did so without citing the "reliable source," which was perhaps so well established by this time that it needed no mention. In this proposal, presented to Molotov on July 1, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland were to be listed as guaranteed states in a separate, secret annex to the alliance treaty—which was a French suggestion. The British and French also insisted that besides Poland, the guarantees include Romania, Turkey, Greece, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.<sup>77</sup> On June 29, *Pravda* published another article by Zhdanov, titled: "The British and French Governments do not want agreement with the USSR."<sup>78</sup>

On July 3, Molotov handed the British and French ambassadors a counterdraft excluding Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland from the projected guarantee. He told the ambassadors orally that the Soviet government would only agree to the inclusion of the last two if Poland and Turkey concluded mutual assistance pacts with the USSR. The Soviet draft also stipulated assistance in case of direct or indirect aggression, defining

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75. Schulenburg telegram, June 29, 1939, *DGFP* D VI, no. 579; Soviet record GK 2, no. 442, also Schulenburg July 3, *DGFP* *ibid.*, no. 607.

76. Potemkin-Schulenburg conversation, July 1, 1939; Russian record, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 402; no German record published.

77. German Ambassador, London, Telegram to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 29, 1939, *DGFP* D VI, no. 581. Anglo-French draft handed to Molotov, July 1, 1939, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., VI, no. 209; *SPE* no. 271; GK 2, no. 453. Thirty-eight visitors to Stalin were listed on the evening of July 1; of these, Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich stayed about five hours, *I A* 1995, no. 5–6, 42.

78. Zhdanov article, June 29, *SPE* no. 269, Degras, *SDFP*, III, pp. 352–353.

the latter as “*an internal coup d’état or a reversal of policy in favor of the aggressor.*” Furthermore, Molotov insisted orally on the simultaneous entry into force of the military and political agreements. Of course, he knew very well that Poland and Turkey did not wish to ally with the USSR, so his proposal may have been intended to drag out the negotiations. In any event, on July 6, the British ambassador was instructed to agree to the omission of Switzerland and the Netherlands, but to reject the simultaneous entry into force of the military and political agreements, also the Soviet definition of indirect aggression. However, the instruction to Seeds reiterated the July 1 inclusion of the list of guaranteed states in an *unpublished protocol*. This suggests that Britain and France were willing to bypass Polish, Romanian, and Baltic objections. Indeed, on July 7, the Polish chargé d’affaires in London, Antoni Jazdzewski, was informed “briefly” about the state of Anglo-Soviet negotiations. In particular, he was told that “the Soviet Union must obtain some compensation for coming to our assistance in the event of our having to implement our guarantee to Poland.” This implied Anglo-French readiness to conclude a military and political treaty with the USSR and making some concessions to the latter’s demands. On July 8, the ambassadors handed a new draft agreement to Molotov, to which the commissar added a draft supplementary letter stipulating the conditional inclusion of the Netherlands and Switzerland. This letter also defined indirect aggression as the action of any of the guaranteed states under the threat of force by another power, *or without any such threat*, involving the use of its territory and forces by that power for the purposes of aggression, and consequently the loss of the state’s independence. On July 11, Halifax suggested to the French that, in return for Russian acceptance of the Anglo-French formula on indirect aggression (which was limited to change of policy under direct threat, as in the Czechoslovak case in 1938), both governments should agree to the Russian demand for the simultaneous signing of the military and political agreements. The French at first opposed this, but then advised the British to accept the Soviet demand rather than risk the breakdown of negotiations.<sup>79</sup>

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79. Soviet counterdraft, July 3, 1939, *SPE* no. 273; *GK* 2, no. 458, emphasis added, A.M.C. On the stipulation of conditionally including the Netherlands and Switzerland, see Molotov to Soviet Ambassadors Maisky and Suritz, July 3, 1939, *SPE* no. 274, *GK* 2, no. 459. Halifax instructions to Seeds, July 6, 7, 1939, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI, nos. 251–253; on conversations with Molotov, see Seeds to Halifax, *DBFP* *ibid.*, nos. 279, 281–282. Correspondence on linking the Anglo-French definition of indirect aggression with signing a military-political agreement, see *DBFP*, *ibid.*, nos. 290, 295, 307. For the Anglo-French proposal of July 8, and Molotov’s supplemental letter July 9, see *SPE* nos. 278, 279, *GK* 2 nos. 465, 467, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 417. For information to Poles, see Halifax to Clifford Norton, British chargé d’affaires, Warsaw, July 12, 1939, *DBFP*, *ibid.*, no. 306, cf. Jazdzewski telegraphic report on July 7 conversation with Ivone Kirkpatrick of the Foreign Office, Warszawa,

Meanwhile, on July 7, Berlin made a move that proved crucial for rapprochement with Moscow. On that day, the German embassy in Moscow was instructed to offer Mikoyan a credit of 200 million reichsmarks—the same amount as in the 1935 agreement and as offered in December 1938—and also to propose a list of issues to be discussed in negotiations for a trade-credit agreement. Three days later, the embassy reported that Mikoyan had received these proposals with great interest, saying he would inform his government and give an answer soon.<sup>80</sup> On July 19, Astakhov reported to Molotov, with whom he was obviously in close touch, that the Germans let no opportunity slip “to let us understand their readiness to change their policy toward us, and that all depended only on us.”<sup>81</sup> Clearly, the German side was anxious to proceed with talks. Moscow was forthcoming as well, for Stalin decided that E. I. Babarin should return to Berlin as deputy head of the Soviet Trade Delegation to negotiate the trade-credit agreement. On July 13, Babarin attended a meeting of the “Stalin Cabinet,” so it is likely that he received his new instructions that evening. Schulenburg reported the decision on sending Babarin on July 16, and the Soviet press announced his departure to conduct negotiations in Berlin on July 22. Ribbentrop assumed that Astakhov and Babarin would immediately report every German statement to Moscow, so the German experts were instructed to infiltrate certain statements by Hitler into the negotiations and to keep in close telephone touch with the German foreign minister.<sup>82</sup>

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teleg. szyfr. no. 120, 121, Polish embassy, London, archives, A.12, ciphers, *PISM*. For French views and advice to the British, see: *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., XVII (Paris, 1984), pt. II (documents from June 29 through July 11).

80. For Weizsäcker's instruction to the Moscow embassy, July 7, 1939, see *DGFP* D VI, no. 628, also Schulenburg report of July 10, *ibid.*, no. 642. No Russian record of this conversation has been published, but Schulenburg reported earlier, June 29, that Molotov told him that day (telegram sent June 29, 2 a.m. so referred to June 28) he approved Mikoyan's attitude in his conversation with Hilger, and that after this matter was settled it might be useful for Schnurre to come to Moscow; *ibid.*, no. 579; Russian record, *GK* 2, no. 442. On the evening of July 10, Stalin saw Molotov, Voroshilov, Beria, Kaganovich and Mikoyan; Molotov came at 8.45 p.m., the rest at 9 or 10 p.m., see: *IA* 1995, 5–6, no. 44.

81. Astakhov letter to Molotov, July 19, 1939, *GK* 2, no. 485..

82. For an earlier Mikoyan-Hilger conversation mentioning Babarin on June 2, see *ibid.*, no. 388. Schulenburg's report on this conversation does not mention Babarin, *DGFP* D VI, no. 465. Babarin had gone to Berlin earlier but returned, presumably to receive new instructions. The July 13 session of the “Stalin Cabinet” was attended by a total of seventeen visitors, of whom Molotov, as usual stayed longest, from 1:45 to 7:15 p.m.; Babarin came at 6:45 and left at 7:05 p.m., see *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 44. For Schulenburg's report on Babarin trip, July 16, see *DGFP* *ibid.*, no. 677. For Weizsäcker's July 22 instruction to Schulenburg on the end of the waiting period mandated to him at the end of June, and instructing him to start political conversations, *ibid.*, no. 700. For Schnurre's daily telephone contact with Ribbentrop during the talks with Babarin, see his letter to Schulenburg, August 2, *ibid.*, no. 756.

Babarin paid a visit to Schnurre on July 18, and stated he had been empowered to negotiate a trade treaty in the German capital, while the German ambassador was to pick up the threads in Moscow.<sup>83</sup> It seems Stalin had decided that trade negotiations could, after all, go forward before establishing a “political base” or, as is more likely, that he expected the trade negotiations to lead to a political agreement. Perhaps sending Babarin to Berlin marked another date at which Stalin decided to throw in his hand with Hitler?

Japan was also an element in Soviet policy in 1939. Some historians see the fighting between Japanese and Soviet forces in summer 1939 in the Far East, on the frontier between Manchukuo and Mongolia, as very important or even central to Stalin’s policy at this time. However, it does not seem to have been significant, given the small size of the forces involved.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the brilliant Soviet intelligence agent in Tokyo, Richard Sorge—who had excellent contacts in high Japanese government circles—reported in June that the Japanese army would not be ready for a major offensive for another two years or so, and the Japanese government did not plan a war against the USSR.<sup>85</sup> This information, together with Soviet military reconnaissance reports, should have convinced Stalin that there was no threat of a major war with Japan. However, it is impossible to evaluate the role of this protracted, distant conflict in Stalin’s European policy, because the records of high-level Politburo and Stalin Cabinet foreign policy

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83. See Schnurre’s report on conversation with Babarin, July 18, 1939, *GDFF* D VI, no. 685.

84. On May 11, Japanese-sponsored Manchukuo (Manchurian) cavalry units had driven Soviet-controlled Outer Mongolian troops across the Holha River on the disputed Nomonhan/Ghalkin Gol section of the frontier between Manchukuo and Mongolia. Three days later, a Japanese reconnaissance unit advanced into this area, but was destroyed by Soviet troops on May 28. The Japanese Kwantung Army then decided to send its 23<sup>rd</sup> division, later supplemented by additional forces, all of which were combined later into the 6<sup>th</sup> Army. The Japanese attack began with the bombing of Soviet positions on June 28, and developed into a land offensive in the first days of July, but ran into Georgii K. Zhukov’s armored and motorized troops, with good artillery support, so it stalled two days later. The Japanese launched another attack on July 23 and pushed the Soviet forces back in two days, but suffered heavy casualties. What followed was a war of attrition until Zhukov launched a victorious offensive on August 20, totally defeating the Japanese forces by August 31. The Japanese 6<sup>th</sup> Army numbered about 75,000 men while Zhukov’s 1st Army Corps numbered 57,000, but the Japanese were spread out over a large area. An armistice was agreed by Molotov and Japanese Ambassador Shigenori Togo in Moscow on September 15, and signed locally the next day, see *DVP* 1939, pt. II., docs. 586, 591. For a discussion of the political and military aspects, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East*, ch. 5.

85. For Richard Sorge telegram, see Haslam, *ibid.*, 131; this telegram was not published in *DVP* 1939 1.

discussions are unavailable. Another event in the Far East that may have caused some concern in Moscow involved British policy in that region. After the Japanese blockade of the British concession at Tientsin in June, the British government signed an agreement with Japan on July 22, recognizing Japanese gains in China. This was resented in Moscow, which was supporting Chiang Kai-Shek.

However, it is likely that another development concerning Britain was more worrisome to Stalin, because it was closer to home. The British government now showed a renewed interest in reaching an agreement with Hitler, and this became public knowledge through leaks to the British press. Helmuth Wohlthat, a high official in Hermann Goering's Four-Year Plan Office, conducted talks in July with some prominent British officials in London. They included Chamberlain's close adviser Sir Horace Wilson, who allegedly expressed great interest in a peaceful settlement with Germany by way of a nonaggression pact, which would make it possible for Britain to discard her East European guarantees. There was also talk of a large loan to Germany. Some details of Wohlthat's conversations were leaked to the press by Robert S. Hudson, secretary of the Board of Overseas Trade, who had earlier led a British trade delegation to Moscow. These leaks appeared in the British press on July 22, with the charge that at least one member of the government was involved in a new attempt at appeasement.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, however, the British and French governments had agreed on July 12 to include in the treaty a formula on indirect aggression closer to the Soviet version. On July 17, the two ambassadors presented a draft to Molotov including their agreed definition of indirect aggression. This assumed armed Soviet action in case a state changed its policy under a clear threat of force by another power, and this change involved the abandonment of its independence or neutrality, but in other cases there were to be consultations. Assistance was to be given according to League of Nations principles, but without the need to follow League procedure or await its action. They also proposed *a secret protocol listing the countries to be guaranteed—which included Poland, Rumania, Estonia, Latvia, and Finland*. Molotov rejected the Anglo-French formula on indirect aggression, saying it did not cover all contingencies. He offered Czech President Emil Hacha's acceptance of Hitler's terms in mid-March 1939 as an example of a state bowing to a threat without it being acknowledged as such. He then

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86. For Wohlthat's July 24 report on his London talks, see *DGFP D VI*, no.716; for confirmation by German Ambassador Herbert von Dirksen, see *ibid.*, nos.710, 746, 752. British historians deny that Wilson made the proposals reported by Wohlthat, since there is no British documentary confirmation, Watt, *How War Came*, 399–400. For press reports and Chamberlain reactions, *ibid.*, 400–401. Wilson made the same proposal to Dirksen on August 3, 1939, *DBFP 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI*, no. 533.



said that if the British and French did not accept the Soviet formula on indirect aggression, there was no point in continuing the conversations. After this ultimatum, however, he went on to insist that the political and military agreements should be signed at the same time and declared this was the "fundamental principle." Once this was settled, he said: "The question as to how agreement on the text of the political articles was to be recorded was a technical matter of secondary importance." Finally, he asked whether or not the British and French governments "were really willing to open military conversations." The two ambassadors assured him they were and French Ambassador Émile Naggiar even said his government would be willing to begin military conversations immediately, without waiting to sign the political agreement. Seeds, however, stated the British government was ready to start technical conversations only if agreement was reached on the article under discussion. Naggiar then asked whether the Soviet government would agree to open military talks at once before the conclusion of political discussions, but proceeding parallel with them. Molotov said he thought the Soviet government might agree. Stalin won this point, which was presumably the goal of Molotov's diatribe, for the ambassadors were authorized on July 21 to agree to the Soviet demand for the simultaneous entry into force of the military and political agreements. They informed Molotov of this on July 22—the day that the leaks appeared in the London press—whereupon he insisted that military conversations start at once without resolving outstanding issues in a political agreement. The Anglo-French agreement to this demand was transmitted on July 21 by "the reliable source" to the German embassy in London, which reported it to Berlin. On July 25, the appropriate instructions were sent from London to Ambassador Seeds.<sup>87</sup>

The Polish government was skeptical of positive results in these negotiations. It viewed bargaining with the Soviets as shopping in an "oriental bazaar," that is, dealing with a devious merchant who constantly upped the price. In any case, as mentioned earlier, the Poles were certain the Soviets would help them in the event of German aggression, for "the Soviet government would be anxious to see Hitler as far from its frontiers as possible." Meanwhile, Beck warned that any Anglo-French commitments involving Poland or the Baltic countries would have "an unfortunate effect." This was a veiled warning against pushing them into Germany's arms,

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87. For the Anglo-French proposal of July 17, see *SPE* no.286, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI, no.338, emphasis added, A.M.C; French urging acceptance of Soviet demands, *ibid.*, no.337; Halifax insisting on the British formula on indirect aggression, *ibid.*, no.338; British agreement to military conversations, *ibid.*, no.435. For secret information on French views and "reliable source" report on Halifax instruction to Seeds of July 21, see Dirksen telegram, July 21, *DGFP* D, VI, no.695.

which the British always feared and thus wished to avoid. It is worth noting, however, that the British envisaged the passage of Soviet troops in the event of a German attack on Poland. Thus, "the instructions to the British Military Mission to Moscow August 1939" for staff conversations with Russia did not preclude Russian entry into Poland, though they indicated some naiveté about the beliefs of the Polish and Soviet governments. The real reason for Polish opposition was fear that the Russians would stay—which was true—but also the alleged fear that the Soviet sojourn there would lead to "communizing the peasantry," which was not a Polish phobia. At the same time, the authors of the memorandum believed the Russians were not enthusiastic about having their troops in Poland for fear they would come under "bourgeois influences," which was not a fear entertained in Moscow. Finally, the "Instructions" perceived the real problem to be that while the Poles might accept Russian "air forces" and raw materials, they did not want Russian soldiers on their soil. The conclusion to this section read: "The position is one that will have to be handled with considerable tact."<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, as instructions were being drawn up for the British delegation in preparation for its departure, Anglo-Soviet relations were at a low ebb. On July 31, R. A. Butler, the parliamentary undersecretary of state for foreign affairs, stated in the House of Commons that the chief difference between the Western powers and Moscow was "the question whether we should infringe the independence of the Baltic States or not." This infuriated the Kremlin. *Izvestiia* commented on August 2 that the chief difference was in the British formula leaving a loophole for an aggressor to do just that. That same day, the Anglo-French formula on indirect aggression, defined as a clear threat to the independence of a Baltic State and consultation in other cases, was offered again to Molotov, who did not welcome it. At this point, the Western-Soviet negotiations lapsed, though the British, at least, expected them to continue parallel to the military talks. On August 4, just as Strang was ordered to leave Moscow for London, the French and British delegations set out for Russia on a small, slow merchant ship, "The City of Exeter." They arrived in Leningrad on August 10, and reached Moscow the next morning. Travel on a merchant ship was chosen because the RAF could not spare its two Sunderland flying boats to accommodate the joint mission, while a railway trip through Germany was clearly undesirable and Halifax thought that sending the mission on a destroyer through the Baltic would be provocative. In any case, the British delegation members were told they were only negotiators, for the final agreement to any military convention rested with the French and British governments.

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88. For Polish views as reported from Warsaw on July 21 and 31, see *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI, nos. 394, 489. Instructions to British military mission, on Polish-Russian relations, *ibid.*, Appendix V, 772.

Moreover, "the main issue is to define the circumstances in which France and Great Britain would assist the Soviet Government should the latter feel obligated to defend the independence or neutrality of one of the Baltic States. Agreement on this point has not been reached." Thus, they were instructed: "Until such time as the political agreement is concluded, the Delegation should therefore go very slowly with the conversations, watching the progress of the political negotiations and keeping in very close touch with His Majesty's Ambassador." By contrast, the French delegation was given full powers to negotiate and told to return with a signed agreement. On August 12, the day the Anglo-French-Soviet military talks began in Moscow, Chamberlain is said to have approved a new definition of indirect aggression very close to the Soviet one, but as it turned out, there was no opportunity to discuss it.<sup>89</sup> By that time, the Soviet leadership had other, increasingly tempting German proposals to consider, which allowed them to take an ever stiffer attitude toward France and Britain in the Moscow negotiations.

As mentioned earlier, the "reliable source" had informed the German embassy in London on July 21 of the forthcoming Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations. This impelled the Germans to speed up their efforts to reach an agreement with the USSR, which were evident in the talks that now took place in Berlin. The German-Soviet trade-credit negotiations provided an excellent opportunity for both sides to sound each other on a possible political deal. Indeed, at this time the future German-Soviet agreement on spheres of influence was outlined in talks between Schnurre on the one hand and the two Soviet representatives, Astakhov and Babarin, on the other. In a preliminary conversation between Schnurre and Astakhov on July 24, the former gave the German view of three stages in improving relations: a trade-credit agreement, press and cultural relations, and political rapprochement. He said there was no conflict between Soviet and German interests, and Germany did not envisage doing anything in the Baltic or in Bessarabia that would harm Soviet interests.<sup>90</sup> The most significant

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89. On Butler statement, July 31 and *Izvestiia*, August 2, see *DBFP*, *ibid.*, no. 512, also *SPE* no. 300 and Degras *SDFP* III, 356. For the Anglo-French draft on indirect aggression, August 2, see *SPE* no.301, *GK* 2, no. 519; on Molotov reaction, *DBFP*, *ibid.*, nos. 525, 527. Instructions to British delegation to go slow, *DBFP*, *ibid.*, pp. 762–763. For instruction to French delegates, *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., vol. XVII (Paris, 1984), doc. 364. On a definition of indirect aggression allegedly approved by Chamberlain, August 12, see Sidney Aster, 1939. *The Making of the Second World War* (New York, 1973), 300; the text of the definition is not given.

90. No German record of this conversation was printed, but see Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 268; for Astakhov record, see *GK* 2, no.294 and *DVP* 1939 I, no. 434; see also his diary notes of conversations with Peter Kleist, a member of Ribbentrop's office, and Schnurre, July 24, *ibid.*, no.431.

conversation took place on July 26. According to Schnurre's report, he talked with Astakhov and Babarin during dinner in the Ewest Restaurant, and the conversation lasted until about 12.30 a.m. The German official again listed the three stages for improving relations, then stated there was no conflict of interest between Germany and the USSR in the region stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea—which was to be the slogan used in German declarations to Moscow from now on. According to Schnurre, Astakhov said it was clear the Danzig and Corridor questions would be resolved one way or another to Germany's advantage. He then asked whether the former Austrian lands would also return to Germany, especially the Galician and Ukrainian regions. Schnurre replied that in all these matters there was no conflict of interest between Germany and Russia. He also said it would be even easier to reach an understanding on Poland, and emphasized that his statements were sanctioned by Ribbentrop. Astakhov said he would report all this to Moscow. At this point, the trade-credit issue came up, but Schnurre gave no details in his report. He concluded by stating his opinion that the Soviet government had not yet made up its mind and was drawing out negotiations with England in order to keep both the British and the Germans guessing.<sup>91</sup>

In his record of the conversation, Astakhov did not report making the statements attributed to him by Schnurre. Instead, he wrote that the German official had gone all out in expressing the German wish for better German-Soviet relations, assuring the Soviet diplomats that Germany had no intention of acting against Soviet interests in the Baltic States, and that she had given up any interest in Ukraine. Astakhov commented that it was not clear whether this included the Ukrainian lands of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>92</sup> Molotov congratulated Astakhov in a telegram sent on July 28, for merely listening to Schnurre's declarations and saying he would transmit them to Moscow.<sup>93</sup> Although Gorlov acknowledges this contact between Astakhov and Molotov, he does not admit it implies previous reports and instructions. Nor does he see any indication of this in Molotov's telegram to Astakhov of July 29, replying to the latter's report. The commissar wrote that if the Germans were sincere in their wish to

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91. By Galician and Ukrainian regions, Astakhov meant former East Galicia—later western Ukraine—then in Poland, and Carpathian Ukraine, then in Hungary; both had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Revised Polish estimates of the 1931 census figures show the Ukrainians and Poles of eastern Poland at just under 5 million each; in this part of Poland, there were also about 2 million Belorussians and one and a quarter million Jews, see Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust* (Jefferson, N.C., 1998), 297, note 14. For Schnurre's record of the July 26 conversation, see *DGFP*, D, VI, no.729.

92. For Astakhov record, see GK 2, no.503, and diary notes, *DVP* 1939 I, no.421. The "Stalin Cabinet" met on July 26 and 27, see: *IA* 1995, no. 5-6, 45.

93. For Molotov to Astakhov, July 28, see GK 2, no. 503.

improve relations with the USSR, then they must say just how they thought this should be done. He noted Schulenburg had also said recently that Germany wished to improve relations with the USSR, but had made no concrete proposals. Molotov concluded: "The matter depends entirely on the Germans. Of course, we would welcome any improvement of political relations between the two sides."<sup>94</sup> Clearly, Stalin and Molotov wanted the Germans to say exactly what they were willing to pay for a political agreement with Moscow.

Indeed, the Germans were now more than interested; they were anxious. The Franco-British decision to send a combined military delegation to Moscow to negotiate a military alliance with the USSR had a galvanizing effect on Hitler and Ribbentrop. They ordered Weizsäcker to instruct Schulenburg on July 29 to sound out Molotov on his impressions of the Berlin talks between Babarin, Astakhov, and Schnurre. Ribbentrop showed his impatience by making the German position official on August 2; he then repeated personally, to Astakhov, Schnurre's statement on the absence of conflict between German and Soviet interests in the area between the Baltic and Black Seas, and said that an agreement could be reached without difficulty. As for Poland, he thought Germany could destroy it in a military campaign of a week to ten days, though he hoped this would not be necessary. Astakhov repeated Molotov's message that Moscow awaited concrete proposals, to which Ribbentrop answered that he wanted to know first if the Soviet government was interested in conducting talks either in Berlin or in Moscow.<sup>95</sup> Ribbentrop instructed Schulenburg to repeat his statements to Molotov, and the ambassador did so on August 3. However, Molotov was unforthcoming despite Schulenburg's repetition of Ribbentrop's statement on there being no conflict of German and Soviet interests between the Baltic and Black Seas. The commissar reminded the ambassador of German support for Japanese aggression against the USSR, and insisted on the economic agreement being signed first. He also used a phrase similar to the one in his July 29 telegram to Astakhov: "Now everything depends on the German side's line of conduct." Schulenburg had the impression that the Soviet government still mistrusted Germany and would conduct long negotiations with the French and British, whom it also dis-

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94. For Molotov to Astakhov, July 29, after receipt of Astakhov's full report, see GK 2, no. 511; Gorlov, "Sovetsko-germanskii dialog," 28. (See note 46 above).

95. On sounding out Molotov's reaction to the talks with Babarin and Astakhov, see Weizsäcker to Schulenburg, July 29, 1939, *DGFP D VI*, no. 736; on Ribbentrop's statement to Astakhov, August 2, 1939, see his telegrams to Schulenburg, August 3, 4, *ibid.*, nos. 758, 770, and Schnurre report of August 3, *ibid.*, no. 761. For Astakhov report, see GK 2, no. 523, longer version in *DVP 1939 I*, no. 445. Schnurre wrote of the Astakhov-Ribbentrop meeting as taking place on August 3, but both Astakhov and Ribbentrop give August 2 as the date.

trusted. He wrote that the Germans would have to make strenuous efforts to bring the Soviet government around.<sup>96</sup>

While the Germans pressed for negotiations, Molotov kept insisting that they make concrete proposals and that the trade-credit agreement be signed first. On August 8, Astakhov sent Molotov a list of what the Germans were ready to concede, and it was a great deal: disinterest in the fate of the Baltic States—except for Lithuania—and also Bessarabia, as well as “Russian Poland” [central Poland, including Warsaw, part of the Russian Empire in 1914]. They also distanced themselves from any aspirations to Ukraine. In exchange, they wished to receive confirmation of Russian disinterest in Danzig and in former German Poland [western or Prussian Poland in 1914], with adjustments in Germany’s favor up to the Warta, or even the Vistula line, and also in Galicia. Of course, discussions on the above could only take place if there was no Anglo-French-Soviet military and political agreement.<sup>97</sup> Two days later, on August 10, Astakhov cabled that according to Schnurre, who had just returned from seeing Ribbentrop at Obersalzberg on August 8–9, the Germans wanted to know the Soviet attitude toward either a peaceful or military solution of the Polish-German dispute over Danzig and the Corridor. If there was war, Germany would not impinge on Soviet interests, but wanted to know what these were. There was no conflict between German and Soviet interests in the region between the Baltic and Black Seas, but the conclusion of a Soviet pact with Britain and France would be a bad introduction to Soviet negotiations with Germany. Thus, it is clear that on August 8–9 Hitler decided to press Stalin for an agreement.<sup>98</sup> On August 11, Molotov telegraphed Astakhov that the list of German objectives cited in his letter of August 8, “interests us,” but their discussion required preparation. Intervening steps should take the form of a

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96. For Schulenburg’s report on his conversation with Molotov, August 3, 1939, see *DGFP* D VI, no.766; Molotov’s record, *GK* 2, no. 525, *DVP* 1939 I, no.446. Stalin had eleven visitors on the evening of August 4. Molotov and Voroshilov were there twice at the same time: 5 .00–9.15, and again 10.30–11.50 p.m., *IA* 1995, 5–6, 47.

97. By Galicia, Schnurre meant East Galicia, now western Ukraine, see Astakhov letter to Molotov, August 8, 1939, *GK* 2, no. 534, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 455. On the evening of August 8, Stalin had 21 visitors; Molotov was there twice: 5.35–6.45, and 9.55 p.m. to 12.00 midnight, *IA* *ibid*.

98. See Astakhov telegram to Molotov, August 10, 1939, *GK* 2, no. 538, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 460; there are minor stylistic differences between the two texts. For Hitler’s final decision on August 8–9 to seek an agreement with the USSR, see Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 292–295. On the evening of August 10, Stalin had 23 visitors. Commissar for Defense Voroshilov and the Chief of the General Staff, Shaposhnikov, visited twice; Zhdanov came as usual; Molotov was absent but probably saw Stalin earlier. The first visitor, Malenkov, arrived at 3.30 and the last visitors left at 1 a.m.; see: *IA* 1995, 5–6, 47–48.

trade-credit agreement, and agreement on other questions. He expected the negotiations to take place in Moscow.<sup>99</sup>

Astakhov's account of what the Germans were ready to offer, and then his report of what Schnurre had told him on August 10, may have convinced Stalin and Molotov that the time had come to begin "concrete" negotiations, or this may have been due to some military information, or a combination of both. Fifty years later, in late December 1989, Alexander N. Yakovlev, Central Committee member and chairman of the commission to examine Stalinist crimes and rehabilitate the victims, told the Second Congress of People's Deputies about the decision to begin negotiations with the Germans. He stated that Stalin was informed on August 7 of German readiness to start military action [against Poland] any day after August 25. He said the situation was discussed on August 11 at a Politburo meeting, which also took into account Hitler's attempts to establish direct contact with Chamberlain and the pessimistic prognosis of the [forthcoming] military negotiations [with the Anglo-French delegation] in Moscow. In view of all the above, it was decided to begin an official discussion of the questions raised by the Germans and to inform Berlin accordingly. This decision, said Yakovlev, led to the beginning of German-Soviet negotiations at Molotov's meeting with Schulenburg on August 15.<sup>100</sup>

The news allegedly received by Stalin on August 7 may have come from German diplomat Rudolf von Scheliha, a paid Soviet agent in the German embassy, Warsaw, with extensive contacts in high German political and military circles. According to a Russian document, Scheliha reported on August 7 that according to the German military attaché at the German embassy in Warsaw, Colonel Gerstenberg, who had just returned from Berlin, Hitler had decided on war and the start of military action against Poland was expected any day after August 25.<sup>101</sup> This is the same wording as that used in the Yakovlev report. However, there is no record of Hitler

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99. See Molotov's telegram to Astakhov, August 11, 1939, GK 2, no. 540.

100. For Yakovlev's report on the secret protocol, December 24, 25, 1989, see note 3 above. On the commission, the rifts within it, and Yakovlev report of December 23, 1989—but not the key report of Dec. 24—see Bezymensky, "The Secret protocols of 1939" in Gorodetsky, *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1991*, 80–83.

101. Some of Rudolf von Scheliha's reports were published in *SPE*, where his name is consistently misspelled as "von Scheliah"; for his report of August 7, see *ibid.*, no. 308. Gerstenberg was presumably Alfred Gerstenberg, the German military attaché in Bucharest in September 1940. Von Scheliha, a counselor in the German embassy, Warsaw, was recruited in 1937 by Soviet intelligence for money he needed to keep up his lavish lifestyle. In August, presumably after he sent this report, he was transferred to the Information Section of the German Foreign Ministry, Berlin, where he continued to gather valuable information for Moscow until his arrest in October 1942; he was executed. See Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB. The Inside Story* (New York, 1990), 240–241, 255–256, 276.

making such a decision around August 5–7, though it is known that he was furious at the Poles over a crisis in Polish-Danzig relations and reports about the mistreatment of Germans in Poland. (The French and British ambassadors cabled their government that these reports were false). It is also known that Hitler fumed at the Poles to Hungarian Foreign Minister István Csáky, whom he received at Berchtesgaden on August 8, but said he still hoped the Poles would be reasonable. Also, the German ambassador to Poland, Hans Adolf von Moltke, was instructed not to return to Poland.<sup>102</sup> Thus, if Gerstenberg had said what Scheliha reported on August 7, this was based probably on rumors in high German military circles and not on any decision by Hitler. Finally, according to German records, Hitler did not tell his military and political leaders of the date of the attack on Poland—August 26—until August 22. Indeed, it is clear he set this date on August 21, when he had the agreement with Stalin in the bag. (On August 25, the attack date was changed to September 1). It is possible, though not mentioned by Yakovlev, that Stalin knew of the meeting on August 7 of a group of British businessmen with Hermann Goering on the island of Sylt to sound out peace possibilities.<sup>103</sup> Whatever the case might be, on August 12—the very day on which the Anglo-French and Soviet military conversations began in Moscow—Astakhov told Schnurre that he had instructions from Molotov to say the Soviet government was interested in discussing the groups of questions that had been raised earlier, but this could only be undertaken gradually and in Moscow, leaving the choice of negotiator to the Germans.<sup>104</sup> Hitler rejoiced and shared the good news with Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, who was visiting with him at the time.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps August 11 marked the moment of Stalin's final decision to align with Hitler—or was it a significant step forward in this direction?

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102. For Hitler-Csáky conversation, see *DGFP D*, VI, no. 784; instruction to Moltke not to return to Warsaw, *DGFP D*, VII (London, Washington, 1956), no. 99.

103. It was actually Chamberlain who was sounding out Hitler, as witness Sir Horace Wilson's conversation with German ambassador Dirksen on August 3 (see note 86 above). Goering told the British businessmen at Sylt on August 7, that no Anglo-German conversations were possible unless Britain and Poland settled the Danzig question with Germany. Later, Wilson proposed a nonaggression pact, again in secret conversations with Fritz Hesse, press attaché at the German embassy, but Hitler's answer on August 20 was that Germany must have her demands on Poland settled first, see Watt, *How War Came*, 404 ff. On August 11, Stalin saw Molotov at 7.45–10.30 p.m. and Voroshilov, at 7:40–10:30 p.m. See *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 48. For Hitler's statement of August 22, that the attack on Poland would begin August 26, see *DGFP D* VII, no. 192.

104. See Astakhov's letter to Molotov, August 12, 1939, *GK* 2, no. 541, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 462, and Schnurre telegram to Schulenburg, August 14, *DGFP D* VII, no. 50.



The Germans did not waste time after hearing Astakhov's message of August 12. After two days of frenetic consultations, Ribbentrop instructed Schulenburg to transmit, through Molotov, Hitler's personal message for Stalin, and the ambassador did so on the evening of August 15. Hitler proposed that Ribbentrop come to Moscow as soon as possible to lay the Führer's views before Stalin. The key part of the message read:

The Reich Government are of the opinion that there is no question between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea which cannot be settled to the complete satisfaction of both countries. Among these are such questions as: the Baltic Sea, the Baltic States, Poland, South-Eastern questions, etc.

Molotov said he would give an answer after communicating the message to his government, but he made a significant statement. He referred to what had been reported to him in June by the Soviet minister in Rome as the "Schulenburg Plan" to improve German-Soviet relations. He said this "plan" stipulated: (1) German-Soviet cooperation in regulating Soviet-Japanese relations and the liquidation of their frontier conflicts; (2) the conclusion of a nonaggression pact and a mutual guarantee of the Baltic States; (3) a broad economic agreement between the two powers. *Molotov now asked whether the German government was interested in "refreshing" or supplementing existing German-Soviet agreements, or in a nonaggression pact? If so, there could be concrete negotiations.* Schulenburg said he would telegraph Molotov's questions to Berlin.<sup>106</sup> This was certainly a direct Soviet proposal.

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105. Schmidt record of Hitler-Ciano conversations at Obersalzberg, August 12, *ibid.*, no. 43, p. 49; Italian record, *DDI*, 8<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. XIII (Rome, 1953), no.4, p. 6.

106. Emphasis added, A.M.C. The German-Soviet agreements Molotov had in mind were the Rapallo Treaty, 1922 and the Treaty of Berlin, 1926. For Ribbentrop's instruction to Schulenburg and the latter's record of conversation with Molotov, August 15, *DGFP* D VII, nos.51, 56, 79; Russian record, *GK* 2, no. 556, *DVP* 1939, I, no.468. This record was first published in Russia, along with records of German-Soviet conversations on August 17, 19, the German-Soviet Credit Agreement of August 19, also a translation of the German text of the nonaggression pact and secret protocol of August 23 1939, and other documents in: *International Affairs*, no. 10 (1989), 81–116, 143. For Soviet Chargé d'Affaires Leon B. Helfand's report from Rome, June 26, 1939, on the so-called Schulenburg Plan, see *GK* 2, no. 437, longer version in *DVP* 1939 I no. 399. This may have been an Italian effort, perhaps inspired by Berlin, to speed up the German-Soviet agreement, for the counselor of the German embassy, Moscow, Werner von Tippelskirch, reported on June 26, that the Italian ambassador, Augusto Rosso, told him the previous day he had received a telegram from his government saying the moment had come to bring about the breakdown of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, see *DGFP*, D VI, no.569. Helfand is not listed in vol. I. of the Russian diplomatic dictionary (Moscow, 1984), presumably because he defected to the West in summer 1940.

Though Molotov and Stalin did not seem to be in a hurry to conclude an agreement with Germany, they gave Hitler—who *was* in a hurry—some indirect encouragement. On August 16, an official in the News and Press Department of the German Foreign Ministry reported that a M. Legrenier (not identified) and a Mr. Barnes, described as a former correspondent of the *New York Herald Tribune* in Moscow, both of whom were known to enjoy excellent relations with the Soviet embassy in Berlin, had each given independent but similar accounts of their conversations with Astakhov and the Soviet press attaché, Smirnov. The Soviet diplomats were reported as saying that Moscow intended to draw out negotiations with the Western powers until Germany settled the Danzig question with Poland, a settlement in which Moscow did not expect the Western powers to be involved. After this, Russia would enter into political discussions with Germany. This statement was also noted by an official of Ribbentrop's office.<sup>107</sup> It must have made Hitler even more eager to secure an agreement with Stalin.

It has been known for some time that the German proposals which Schulenburg put to Molotov on August 15 were reported that day to Washington by the American ambassador in Moscow, Laurence A. Steinhardt. They had been communicated to Charles Bohlen of the U.S. embassy by his tennis partner, Hans Heinrich ("Johnny") von Herwarth, first secretary at the German embassy, Moscow, and personal assistant to Ambassador von Schulenburg. Both were covert opponents of the Nazi regime, but wished for the peaceful return of Danzig and part of the Polish Corridor to Germany. Indeed, Schulenburg hoped a German-Soviet agreement would accomplish this aim and thus prevent war. It is worth noting that information on earlier German-Soviet talks had also reached Washington and had provoked a reaction from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Herwarth had passed on to Bohlen the contents of the Schulenburg-Molotov conversation of August 3, which the U.S. embassy transmitted to Washington. There is no evidence that it was passed on to the British, French, or Polish governments, but Roosevelt warned the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Konstantin A. Oumansky, that if war broke out in Europe and the Far East, and if the Axis powers were victorious, then both the United States and the USSR would be affected, but the latter would be affected immediately. Therefore, the president believed that an agreement against aggression on the part of other European powers would have a stabilizing effect. This message was repeated by Steinhardt to Molotov on August 16, but it

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107. Report on Soviet diplomats' statements by Legrenier and Barnes, *DGFP D VII*, no.84. Ralph Barnes had been the *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent in Berlin, then Moscow, and in 1939 he was again in Berlin.

did not seem to have any effect.<sup>108</sup> After this, Washington did pass on Steinhardt's second report to the British. On August 17, the U.S. Under-Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, told the British ambassador in Washington, Sir Ronald Lindsay, that the German ambassador in Moscow had seen Molotov two days earlier and transmitted an oral statement from Hitler to Stalin to the effect that Germany had no aggressive intentions towards the Soviet Union, and that there was no conflict of interest between the two powers "from the Baltic to the Black Sea." Thus, Germany was ready to discuss any territorial questions in Eastern Europe and conversations should start very soon because she was ready to send a negotiator to Moscow immediately.<sup>109</sup> However, this message was intercepted and delayed, most likely by Francis Herbert King. Six years later, at the Potsdam Conference, Anthony Eden told Bohlen that due to a communist spy in the Foreign Office code room, it was not received until after Berlin had announced Ribbentrop's forthcoming visit to Moscow. The Lindsay telegram was, indeed, officially registered in the foreign office on August 18 at 9.30 a.m., but was not received in the Central Department until August 22.<sup>110</sup> Halifax told the U.S. ambassador, Joseph F. Kennedy, on August 23, that [Sir Robert G.] Vansittart [the chief diplomatic adviser to the Foreign Office] "believes there is a provision in the agreement providing for the fourth partition of Poland."<sup>111</sup> Perhaps, Vansittart had read the Lindsay telegram, or perhaps also the report sent that day to Paris by the French ambassador in Berlin, Robert Coulondre. Whatever Vansittart's source, he informed Halifax, who passed it on to Kennedy.

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108. For Steinhardt report, August 15, 1939, see *FRUS* 1939, I, 334–35; see also Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History* 1929–1939 (New York, 1973), 80–82, and Hans von Herwarth, with S. Frederick Starr, *Against Two Evils* (New York, 1981), 159–160. For report on German proposals of August 3, see U.S. Chargé in the Soviet Union (Grummon) to secretary of state, Moscow, August 3, 1939, *FRUS* 1939, I, 292–293. For President Roosevelt's warning to Ambassador Oumansky, with request that Steinhardt repeat it to Molotov, see under secretary of state to Steinhardt, August 4, 1939, *ibid.*, 293–294; for Steinhardt's report on conversation with Molotov, August 16, *ibid.*, 296–298; Russian record: *SPE* no.329, GK 2, no. 564.

109. For Welles' report on German proposals of August 15 to the British ambassador, see Sir Ronald Lindsay to Halifax, Washington, August 17, 1939, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VII (London, 1954), no.41.

110. See Watt, "Francis Herbert King," *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1988): 79, and his "An Intelligence Surprise: The Failure of the Foreign Office to Anticipate the Nazi-Soviet Pact," *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1989): 524; here Watt names the Soviet agent as John Herbert King. For Eden to Bohlen at Potsdam, see Bohlen, *Witness to History*, 80–82. Herwarth writes that the message was not deciphered until after the spy was replaced, *Against Two Evils*, 161, but this is incorrect because King was arrested after September 4, see note 116 below.

111. Kennedy to secretary of state, August 23, 1939, *FRUS*, 1939, I, 339–340.

There is no documentary evidence that the British government communicated the contents of Lindsay's telegram—once it had reached the Foreign Office Central Department on August 22—either to the French or the Polish governments. The same is true of the information regarding the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact signed on August 23. This news was transmitted again by Herwarth to Bohlen, reported by Steinhardt to Washington on August 24, and communicated by the latter that same day to the British ambassador in Moscow.<sup>112</sup> It must be assumed that the latter informed his government, but there is no published document showing the State Department transmitted this news to the British or French ambassador in Washington. It is also clear that the Polish ambassador in Washington was not informed, even though some high U.S. officials were fully cognizant of what it meant for Poland. Instead, President Roosevelt decided to launch another appeal for peace to European heads of state, including Hitler and President Ignacy Mościcki of Poland.<sup>113</sup> It is also strange that though Ambassador Coulondre had warned Paris on August 22 of an imminent German-Soviet agreement, and two days later communicated reports from high Berlin circles that a German-Soviet understanding had been reached “regulating” the situation in Eastern Europe—including a partition of Poland along the Vistula River—there is no evidence of this being communicated to the Polish ambassador in Paris. Vansittart probably heard of it through his own channels in Berlin or Paris. Perhaps French Premier Daladier hoped that, despite the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, French agreement to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland—sent to General Joseph Doumenc in Moscow on the night of August 21—might still allow the conclusion of a Franco-British-Soviet alliance to deter Hitler from war, even if it meant the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland, as reported by Coulondre three days later on August 24. (In fact, Bonnet may have envisaged this in

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112. See Herwarth, *Against Two Evils*, 166–167, and Bohlen, *Witness to History*, 82–83; Steinhardt to secretary to state, August 24, 1939 noon (received Washington, August 24 11:15 a.m.), FRUS, 1939, I 342–343; on informing the British ambassador and his incredulity, see Steinhardt to secretary to state, August 24, 5 p.m. (received 5:40 p.m.), *ibid.*, 343–344. For Polish text and comments, see Piotr S. Wandycz, “Telegram Steinhardta,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 84 (Paris, 1988): 204–207.

113. Under Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle noted in his diary on August 24 that in view of what was known in Washington about the German-Soviet agreement to partition Poland, “a strong message” to the latter, as urged from London by Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, would have to start with some such words as: “In view of the fact that your suicide is required, kindly oblige” etc., see Adolf A. Berle, *Navigating the Rapids, 1918–1971* (New York, 1973), 243. For Roosevelt's peace appeal of August 24 to Mościcki and the latter's reply see FRUS 1939, I, 361–62, 368.

May).<sup>114</sup> If so, it would not be in Daladier's interest to inform the Polish government of the Coulondre report.

The grounds for the decision of the British and French governments not to communicate to the Poles the terms of the forthcoming Nazi-Soviet agreement, and then the agreement itself, are not known. It is most likely they still hoped to secure Soviet alliance or neutrality, if need be, at Poland's expense. Furthermore, in the second half of August, Hitler was intensifying his pressure on Poland, so British and French statesmen were primarily focusing on this crisis, which threatened to erupt into war. But it is also a fact that, though Halifax had mentioned the possibility of a German-Soviet agreement at a Cabinet meeting in June, the Foreign Office—like the Poles—refused to take it seriously, and this despite a number of reports received between May and July 1939.<sup>115</sup> In particular, Krivitsky's warnings about the imminence of a Nazi-Soviet pact had been dismissed by the foreign office as "twaddle," "rigmarole," and "directly contrary to all our other information." It was only after the conclusion of the pact that he was listened to with more respect. After this, he was instrumental in unmasking Soviet spies in the Foreign Office. According to an unpublished entry in Under-Secretary of State Alexander Cadogan's diary on September 4, a telegram was received that day from Washington with some information on "leaks over the last four years, from someone in communications." King was arrested soon thereafter and on September 26, Cadogan noted that investigators were "on the track of others" who remain unknown. In any case, the whole staff of the communications department was dismissed and a new order established, though Soviet moles elsewhere would continue espionage on Moscow's behalf for many years to come.<sup>116</sup>

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114. See Coulondre to Bonnet, August 22, 1939, *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVIII (Paris, 1985), no. 253, 301–302 (the document heading erroneously lists François-Poncet as the ambassador, whereas he was then French ambassador in Rome, A.M.C); for Coulondre report, August 24, on German information about the partition of Poland, see *ibid.*, no. 377, 451 (here Moscow is erroneously listed instead of Berlin, as the origin of the telegram A.M.C). For Bonnet's note of a conversation with Suritz, May 26, with the former's comment on abandoning the Baltic States and part of Poland as the price of the Soviet alliance, see *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVI, no. 289. However, the editorial note states this may have been written by Bonnet later to justify his policy (presumably, his appeasement of Germany, A.M.C) see *ibid.*, p. 571. For Daladier telegram to Doumenc of August 21, received the next day, see discussion of Moscow negotiations later in this paper.

115. See Watt, "An Intelligence Surprise," especially the appendix listing twenty-two "Warnings or intimations of Nazi-Soviet Negotiations which are recorded as having reached British representatives, April-August 1939," 532–534.

116. On the arrest of King and others, see Watt, "Francis Herbert King," 7.

As mentioned earlier, Poland was frequently blamed by Soviet and Western sources, both at the time and since, for the breakdown of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet military negotiations in Moscow. However, German documents available since the late 1950s, as well as recently published Russian documents, do not support this conclusion. Indeed, one Russian document throws new light on Stalin's thinking just before the Anglo-French mission arrived in Moscow. On August 7, Stalin dictated instructions to Voroshilov on how to conduct the negotiations with the British and French military delegations. By this time, of course, the "Vozhd" knew that Hitler was ready to offer him what he wanted regarding Poland, the Baltic States, and southeastern Europe. What is striking in these instructions is Stalin's deep distrust of France and Britain and the listing of Russian demands that he expected their representatives to refuse. The instructions are worth quoting in full:

1. agreement by both sides on secrecy;
2. first, present our full powers to conduct negotiations, and then ask the leaders of the Anglo-French delegation whether they also have full powers from their governments to sign a military convention with the USSR.
3. If they do not have such full powers, show surprise, throw up your hands, and "respectfully" ask what was the purpose of their governments in sending them to the USSR.
4. If they answer that they were sent to negotiate and prepare the ground for signing the military convention, ask them if they have any plan to defend the future allies, i.e. France, England, USSR etc., against aggression by the aggressors' bloc in Europe.
5. If it appears that they don't have any concrete plan of defense against aggression in one variant or another, which is unlikely, then ask them on the basis of what questions, what defense plan, the French and English think they will conduct negotiations with the military delegation of the USSR.
6. If the French and English still insist on negotiations, then direct these to the discussion of separate, principal questions, mainly on allowing the passage of our armies through the Vilna corridor and Galicia, also through Romania.
7. If it appears that the free passage of our armies through the territory of Poland and Romania is ruled out, then declare that without [the fulfillment of] this condition agreement is impossible, because without the free passage of Soviet armies through the indicated territories any variant of defense against aggression is doomed to failure, [and] that we do not consider it possible to participate in an undertaking that is doomed to fail.
8. To requests that we show the French and English delegations our defense factories, institutes, military units and military instruction centers,

say that after the visit of the pilot Lindbergh to the USSR in 1938, the Soviet government forbade showing defense enterprises and military units to foreigners, except to our allies—when these appear on the scene.<sup>117</sup>

It is true that in his earlier memorandum on Soviet ideas for the negotiations, the chief of the Soviet General Staff, Boris M. Shaposhnikov, had specified the passage of Soviet troops through Poland (against Germany) and through Romania (to aid Turkey).<sup>118</sup> These would, indeed, be the logical directions of Soviet military action against Germany—if it was intended. However, no Russian documents have surfaced to prove that it was. Moreover, Stalin's instructions to Voroshilov indicate that a Franco-British agreement to Soviet demands was not expected. Indeed, Voroshilov told a member of the French delegation almost at the outset that he did not believe the Polish and Romanian governments were asking for Soviet help, and according to a French report, the Soviet demands for troop passage through those countries did not seem to be sincere.<sup>119</sup>

In fact, the Soviet government had not raised the issue until Voroshilov did so at the first official meeting of the delegations on August 12, and made it the key Russian condition two days later. It is worth noting that on that day, August 14, Voroshilov asked for a fifteen-minute interval when the head of the British delegation, Admiral Ernle Drax, asked how Soviet armed forces would be used if permission were given for passage through the Poland and Romania. After the interval—when Voroshilov clearly consulted Stalin—he read a statement that talks could not go on since, without

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117. See *DVP* 1939, I, no. 453, p.584 (trans. A.M.C.). Voroshilov was with Stalin on August 7 between 6.35 and 10 p.m; other visitors included Molotov, Zhdanov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich, see: *IA* 1995, no. 5–6, 47. The Lindberghs had paid flying visits to the USSR in 1931 and 1933, and flew in for a short visit in August 1938. They received royal treatment, so the Russians were greatly angered by a report on Lindbergh's negative remarks on the Russian air force and bad Soviet conditions, also his expectation that the Soviet system would collapse. The report was printed in the London news sheet, *The Week*, see Wayne S. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle Against American Intervention in World War II* (New York and London, 1974), 29.

118. For Shaposhnikov's memorandum of August 4, 1939, see *GK* 2, no. 527; *DVP* 1939, I, no. 447; on passage through Poland and Romania, p.575.

119. In his end report on the negotiations, Jacques Antoine Williaume, French corvette captain and professor at the École de Guerre Navale, noted that at the August 14 session, there was an atmosphere of great doubt about the sincerity of Soviet demands for troop passage through Poland and Romania. He also recorded Voroshilov as saying: "Je ne crois pas que la Pologne et la Roumanie demandent notre aide," see Williaume report, Monday, August 14, section 29, *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVIII, Addenda, V, p. 598.

a positive solution to this question, the attempt to conclude a military convention was “doomed to failure.” However, once a positive answer was received, the Soviet military mission would be willing “to set out its plan for joint action against aggression in Europe.” Three days later, in the early afternoon of August 17, he announced that the negotiations were suspended until August 20 or 21, justifying this by the lack of a Franco-British reply on the passage of Soviet troops through Poland and Romania. However, he agreed with the British suggestion that the negotiations resume on the later date.<sup>120</sup>

The suspension of the Moscow talks led to strenuous Anglo-French efforts—more French than British—to secure the Polish government’s agreement to the passage of Soviet troops. However, the Poles said the Russians were not to be trusted. There was no assurance, they said, that once they were on Polish soil, they would fight the Germans. The USSR was expected to be neutral in a Polish-German war, so once the Russians came in they would not fight but just stay, i.e., annex eastern Poland. There was also mention of the Piłsudski dogma that no foreign troops could be allowed on Polish soil, and of the Polish belief that while the Germans threatened the Poles with physical destruction, the Soviets threatened to destroy their souls. Ultimately, all that could be obtained on August 19 was Polish agreement for the Anglo-French military mission either to convey the Poles’ negative answer, or to say the question had not been raised in Warsaw. Captain Beaufre, sent to the Polish capital from Moscow, left with this message on August 20, arriving in Moscow the next day. The French military attaché in Warsaw, General Félix Musse, telegraphed the news to Paris that afternoon and, according to Beaufre, also to General Doumenc in Moscow.<sup>121</sup>

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120. For the Russian record of the military talks through August 17, see: *SPE* nos. 314–317, 319, 327–328, 33; *GK* 2, nos. 546–548, 559–560, 566, and summary in *DVP* 1939, I, no.506; British record, *DBFP* D 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., VI, appendix V; French record, *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., XVII, part II, and Addenda; XVIII, part I.

121. For Beaufre’s account of his Warsaw mission, see note 6 above; for French documents on the efforts to obtain Polish assent to Soviet troop passage, August 17–20, see *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVIII, note 108. See also account by Léon Noël, *Polonia Restituta. La Pologne entre deux mondes* (Paris, 1984), ch. XXI. In writing this negative account of prewar Poland, the aged ambassador did not bother to read the *DDF* documents, but relied on his memory and older sources. For the Polish side, see Łukasiewicz papers, “Franco-British-Soviet Negotiations in Moscow,” *Diplomat in Paris*, 233–252 and *Dyplomata w Paryżu*, 283–304. For Polish diplomatic documents on Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations, see “Polskie akty dyplomatyczne odnoszące się do rokowań brytyjsko-francusko-sowieckich w okresie przed wybuchem drugiej wojny światowej,” *Bellona*, styczeń-marzec (1955): 60–77. See also the notes on the allied negotiations with Russia and pressure exerted on Poland, written later from memory by the Polish Chief of Staff, General Wacław Stachiewicz, *Wierności dochowaś żołnierskiej*, edited by Marek Tarczyński (Warsaw, 1998), 126–140.



It should be noted that just before and during the Moscow negotiations, Soviet hints to the Germans seemed designed to increase Berlin's desire for an agreement with the USSR. Thus, on August 10, Schulenburg reported from Moscow that according to "a reliable source," the British were conceding the Soviet right, in the event of a direct attack on a Baltic State, to move in troops under the guarantee, even if the state in question did not request assistance. This may have referred to a new formula discussed in the Foreign Office. If so, it could have been obtained by King and passed on to Moscow. On August 14, the German embassy in London passed on another report from the "reliable source" that Strang, who had just returned from Moscow, was optimistic about an alliance between Britain, France, and the USSR. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, on August 16, the German Foreign Ministry learned that, according to Astakhov and Smirnov, the Soviet side was deliberately drawing out the negotiations until the Danzig-Corridor question was settled to Germany's advantage. Finally, on August 17, the German embassy in London reported that according to the "reliable source," the Moscow negotiations were going well and the Poles were ready to begin staff talks with the Soviets.<sup>122</sup> This news is unlikely to have come from the Anglo-French mission or the British Foreign or War Offices, so it may have been a Soviet fabrication meant to worry the Germans.

As it turned out, the Soviet leaders did not wait for the results of Anglo-French efforts in Warsaw, but decided to suspend the military negotiations before these efforts began. In fact, there was a direct connection between Hitler's instruction of August 16 to Schulenburg to see Molotov, and the suspension of the military negotiations by Voroshilov the next day. Hitler's directive to Schulenburg to seek an immediate appointment with Molotov led the ambassador to instruct Counselor Hilger at 10 a.m. on August 17 to request an audience for the ambassador with the commissar. On hearing this, Stalin ordered Voroshilov to confront the French and British military delegates with the demand that they provide an answer on Soviet troop passage through Poland, and as mentioned earlier, the negotiations were suspended that afternoon until August 21. Stalin also instructed Molotov on August 17 to see the German ambassador by 8 p.m. at the latest, to hear what he had to say.<sup>123</sup> When Molotov met with Schulenburg that evening,

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122. Schulenburg report, August 10, see *DGFP* D VII, no. 14. On Strang being optimistic (which he was not), see report of August 14, *ibid.*, no. 55. For Legrenier and Barnes on Astakhov and Smirnov statements, see note 107 above; report on alleged on Polish-Russian staff talks, August 17, *DGFP*, *ibid.*, no. 99.

123. For the linkage between Schulenburg's message to Hilger and the suspension of the military negotiations on August 17 by Voroshilov, see Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 320–321. For the Russian record of the discussions by military delegations on August 17 and the suspension of talks, see *GK* 2, no. 566.

the German ambassador declared his government was ready to conclude a nonaggression pact with the USSR and to give a joint German-Soviet guarantee to the Baltic States. It was also ready to use its offices to improve Soviet-Japanese relations. Furthermore, Hitler believed that given the dangerous situation—imminent war with Poland—Ribbentrop was ready to come to Moscow as the German plenipotentiary any time after August 18, to negotiate and sign the nonaggression agreement. Schulenburg also gave the commissar an aide-mémoire to this effect. Molotov, for his part, *gave the ambassador an aide-mémoire stating that the first step should be the conclusion of the trade-credit agreement, and then the signature of a non-aggression pact or confirmation of the neutrality treaty of 1926; this should be signed simultaneously with a secret protocol on the interest of the two parties in these and other questions of foreign policy. The protocol would be an organic part of the pact.* Schulenburg asked about the secret protocol, but Molotov said that first there must be a draft of the nonaggression pact, or the confirmation of a neutrality agreement. Ribbentrop could come to Moscow that week, or the next.<sup>124</sup>

Two days later, on August 19 at 9.30 p.m. Paris time—11.30 p.m. Moscow time—Daladier received a telephone message from General Musse in Warsaw on the failure of French efforts to get the Poles to agree to the passage of Soviet troops. Even if this news reached Stalin immediately, either from Warsaw or from Paris, it is unlikely it could have been deciphered until late that night, and in any case, Molotov had proposed a non-aggression agreement and secret protocol to the German ambassador two days earlier. What is more, on the afternoon of August 19—that is, before the Polish reply was reported by Musse to Daladier in Paris and/or to Doumenc in Moscow—Molotov twice called in Schulenburg to see him. On the second occasion, he handed the ambassador the proposed Soviet text of the nonaggression treaty, though he did not supply a draft of the secret protocol, saying this would be negotiated later. It is significant that, *unlike previous Soviet nonaggression pacts, this one did not stipulate abrogation if one of the parties was involved in aggression against a third country.* Thus, Hitler knew that Moscow had no objection to his attack on Poland. As in the Soviet aide-mémoire of August 17, the postscript to the Soviet draft of August 19 stated the pact would come into force only with the simultaneous signature of a separate protocol based on points of interest to the foreign policy of both sides, and that this protocol was to form an

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124. Emphasis added, A.M.C. For the Russian record of the Molotov-Schulenburg conversation, August 17, with Russian and German aide-mémoires, see GK 2, no. 570, DVP 1939 I, no. 470; German record and same, DGFP D VII, no. 105.

integral part of the pact.<sup>125</sup> Thus, it is clear that the Soviet side stipulated this condition. As for the German-Soviet trade-credit agreement, it was signed in Berlin on August 19. However, as Schnurre told Fleischhauer many years later, the directive for Babarin to sign did not arrive from Moscow until very late that night.<sup>126</sup>

It is not known exactly what impelled Stalin to have Molotov give Schulenburg a draft of the nonaggression pact on August 19, though it can be assumed that Hitler's pressure for Ribbentrop's visit to Moscow within the next few days may have been the key factor. However, Fleischhauer and most Russian historians offer another explanation, which is in general agreement with part of Yakovlev's report of December 23, 1989, on the nonaggression pact. Yakovlev stated that on August 19–20, Stalin received documented indications that England, France, and Poland would not change their attitude. Yakovlev went on to say that Stalin apparently hoped to influence England and France by concluding the pact but miscalculated, for after it was signed the Western powers lost all constructive interest in the USSR.<sup>127</sup> However, it should be noted with regard to the first statement that Molotov had told Schulenburg two days earlier, on August 17, that the Soviet government was ready to sign a nonaggression pact with Germany, and that a secret protocol must be an integral part of it. As for Yakovlev's second statement, it is not true that France and Britain lost interest in a treaty with the USSR, as witness Daladier's agreement on August 21 to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland. The British declared their agreement on August 24, that is, after the signing of the nonaggression pact (see below). Still, it is possible that Stalin intended to use the pact as a lever to force the western powers to grant his demand regarding Poland and Romania, for he could only have welcomed British and French approval of Soviet military entry into those countries. Or he might have calculated that if he had agreements with both sides and Germany seized western, northern, and central Poland, he could annex eastern Poland and

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125. Emphasis added, A.M.C. For the German record of the Molotov-Schulenburg conversations August 19, see: *DGFP* D VII, no.132; Russian record: *GK* 2, no. 572, *DVP* 1939 I no.474. Fleischhauer believes the fighting in the Far East was at the heart of Stalin's nonaggression draft proposal, *Der Pakt*, p.332, but see note 84 above.

126. For Schnurre's account of the delays, see Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 522, note 471 to part III; for the text of the agreement, except part C, listing what the USSR was to supply to Germany, see: *GK*, 2, no.575; on part C, see note 71 above. For the text of the Credit Agreement, see also Edward F. Ericson, *Feeding the German Eagle: Soviet Economic Aid to Nazi Germany, 1933–1941* (London, 1999), Appendix B; for lists of goods exchanged by Germany and the USSR, 1939–41, *ibid.*, Tables 2.7–3.1.

justify this by Soviet security reasons without jeopardizing an alliance with the Western powers. Whatever Stalin's calculations may have been, on August 21, he agreed to Hitler's personal request that Ribbentrop come to Moscow and the date was set for August 23.<sup>128</sup> He could hardly refuse the Führer's request without risking the loss of the nonaggression pact.

As mentioned earlier, the German and Soviet governments announced the signature of the economic agreement and Ribbentrop's forthcoming visit to Moscow on August 21 and 22 respectively. The Anglo-French-Soviet talks, suspended on August 17, resumed at 11.03 a.m. on August 21, but were adjourned at 5.25 p.m. for an indefinite time. They were not resumed despite Daladier's instruction, sent to General Doumenc on the night of August 21, that France agreed to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland, that is, through the Wilno corridor and, if necessary, also through Galicia and Romania. Delivery of this instruction was delayed by Soviet intelligence for several hours, so it was conveyed by the French general to Voroshilov at 6.30 p.m. the next day. The latter did not find it sufficient because the British delegation had not announced its government's agreement, even though they did not dissent. [Drax was instructed to associate himself with Doumenc on August 24]. Moreover, Voroshilov now made a new demand: that the Polish and Romanian governments themselves give their agreement, and Molotov repeated the same demand to Naggiar.<sup>129</sup> The French government seized on this straw to pursue an agreement with the USSR regardless of the nonaggression pact. In 1946, Daladier defended himself publicly against charges of preventing an Anglo-French-Soviet alliance in 1939. He claimed to have called in Polish Ambassador Łukasiewicz on the morning of August 21 and told him that if he did not inform him that afternoon, after telephoning Warsaw, that the Polish

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127. For Yakovlev's statement of December 23, 1989 on information received by Stalin on August 19–20 that Britain, France, and Poland did not intend to change their position, and on Polish refusal of the passage of Soviet troops, see 1939 *God*, 486, also other sources listed in note 3 above.

128. For Schulenburg's delivery of Hitler's message to Molotov August 21, and the latter's communication of Stalin's agreement to Ribbentrop's arrival on August 23, see *DGFP* D VII, nos. 157, 159; for the Russian texts of the Hitler-Stalin messages, see *GK* 2, nos. 582, 583; Stalin message, *DVP* 1939 I, no. 478. Fleischhauer sees August 21 as the date of Stalin's decision to line up with Hitler, *Der Pakt*, 339. The question of Ribbentrop's arrival may have been discussed on the evening of August 20, when Stalin saw 14 visitors, of whom Molotov stayed the longest as usual, from 6 to 10.35 p.m., see: *IA* 1995, 5–6, 48–49.

129. For Daladier to Doumenc, August 21, see *DDF*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., vol. XVIII, no.182, p.232 and note 5. Voroshilov's conversation with Doumenc, August 22, *SPE* no.342; for Doumenc to Daladier, August 23, 1.32 a.m., *DDF* *ibid.*, no. 268 (the document number is misprinted as 2 instead of 268); Naggiar's report on Molotov to Naggiar, *ibid.*, no. 267. On Drax associating himself with Doumenc, August 24, *ibid.*, no.348.

government agreed to the passage of Soviet troops, he, Daladier, would raise the whole question of the Franco-Polish alliance at a meeting of the Council of Ministers. If, however, the ambassador did not manifest Polish opposition by the afternoon, Daladier would telegraph General Doumenc authorizing him to sign the military convention that was proposed [by the Soviets]. However, Ambassador Łukasiewicz denied Daladier had presented him with this ultimatum. The ambassador wrote that if this had occurred, he would have refused to accept it, or proposed it be sent to Ambassador Noël for delivery in Warsaw, or he would have threatened to resign and made this public, something that would have been very inconvenient for Daladier.<sup>130</sup> As mentioned above, Daladier sent the French agreement to Doumenc anyway.

The Polish government and press received the news of the nonaggression pact calmly. In an instruction of August 23 to Polish diplomatic posts, Beck wrote the pact was proof of the Soviets' double-dealing, indicating they did not want to engage themselves on either side, but would welcome the possibility of a European war. He took comfort from the assumption that like other Soviet nonaggression pacts, this one too must have a clause abrogating the agreement if one of the parties became involved in hostilities with a third party.<sup>131</sup> British Ambassador Kennard reported on August 24 that Polish reaction to the news of the pact was calm; the Polish press was taking the line that Russia was withdrawing from Europe, and nothing had changed.<sup>132</sup> This view, as well as the fact that Britain supported Soviet troop passage only if Germany attacked Poland, made it easier for the Poles to agree to a formula allowing the continuation of the Franco-British-Soviet talks in Moscow. As General Musse wrote in his final report, Ambassador Noël made an urgent démarche to Beck in the late evening of August 23, and the Polish foreign minister accepted a formula that General Doumenc was to use in speaking to the head of the Soviet delegation in Moscow. He could state:

We have acquired the certainty that, in case of common action against a German aggression, collaboration between Poland and the USSR, in technical conditions to be determined, is not excluded (or is possible).

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130. For Daladier's claim of what he allegedly said to the Polish ambassador and the latter's rebuttal, see *Diplomat in Paris*, 252–253, Polish text in Juliusz Łukasiewicz, *Dyplomata w Paryżu 1936–1939*, 298–299.

131. For Beck's Instruction, August 23, 1939, see *Akty dyplomatyczne*, 75, reprinted in Władysław T. Kowalski, *Polska w polityce międzynarodowej (1939–1945). Zbiór dokumentów, 1939* (Warsaw, 1989), no. 163, 466.

132. For Kennard's report of August 24, 1939 on Polish calm, see *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, part II, series F, vol. 58, *Poland, 1939* (Lanham, MD, 1990), doc. 303, 307.

The French and British General Staffs therefore consider that *all* the hypotheses for collaboration should be studied immediately.

The text of the British message to Moscow, as agreed with the Poles, was more specific and closer to Polish thinking. It read:

We have learned for certain that in the event of common action against German aggression, collaboration under technical conditions to be settled subsequently between Poland and the USSR, is not to be excluded.<sup>133</sup>

However, there was no communication between the Anglo-French military mission and Voroshilov, who did not answer their joint letter to him until August 25 when he met separately with the British and French delegation leaders. When Doumenc reiterated his message to Voroshilov, he was told that the talks between the military delegations could not continue because “political conditions had changed.” [The Anglo-Polish Mutual Assistance Treaty was signed in London that afternoon]. When British Admiral Drax asked whether, in view of the change in the international situation, the Soviet government still desired to continue the talks, Voroshilov said he had been unable to reply to the joint letter of the French and British delegations—because he had been on a duck hunt! He then said that, to his regret, the change in the international situation made any further conversations useless.<sup>134</sup>

As is known, the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact was signed on August 23, while the secret protocol was worked out and signed at the Kremlin on the night of August 23–24. No Russian record of these negotiations has been published, but it is clear the Germans quickly gave up any claims they may have had to East Galicia. Furthermore, according to German sources Stalin demanded the inclusion of the Latvian ports of Libau (Liepaja) and

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133. For the French version of the formula agreed in the late evening of August 23 between Beck and Noël, see the latter's telegram of August 23, *DDF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. XVIII, no. 275, and Musse report of August 24, *ibid.*, no. 396, p. 480 (trans. A.M.C). Halifax informed Kennard on August 22, that Britain gave general support to France regarding the passage of Soviet troops through Poland, but only if the latter was at war with Germany, *DBFP* 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VII, no. 150. For the text of the Polish message, as reported by the British ambassador, see Kennard to Halifax, August 23, 1939, 3. 30 p.m., *ibid.*, no.176. The Polish version, as communicated by Beck to Łukasiewicz, did not mention an eventual agreement between Poland and the USSR; see *Diplomat in Paris*, p. 257.

134. For the meeting between Voroshilov and key members of the Anglo-French Mission, August 25, 1 p.m., see *DDF*, *ibid.*, no. 457 and *DBFP*, *ibid.*, no. 277 (including Voroshilov on duck hunt), and Appendix II, pp. 613–614. Voroshilov also saw the British and French ambassadors, but separately so they could not communicate with each other, see point 7 in report by General T.G. Heywood, *DBFP*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. VI, 607.

Windau (Ventspils) in the Soviet sphere of influence, and Ribbentrop received Hitler's agreement to this by telephone. On August 28, the Pisa River was added, at Molotov's request, to the northern part of the demarcation line in Poland.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, this line, which ran through the middle of Warsaw, was shown as the demarcation line between the Soviet and German armies on the map published in *Pravda* on September 23. This map was published in several Soviet newspapers over the next few days.

In the early hours of September 17, just after Stalin informed the German ambassador that Soviet troops were about to enter Poland, Potemkin read an official note, signed by Molotov, to Polish Ambassador Grzybowski, who was summoned to Potemkin's office at 2 a.m. The note—which the ambassador refused to accept, but was delivered to the Polish embassy during his interview with Potemkin—read as follows:

The Polish-German war has revealed the internal bankruptcy of the Polish State. In ten days of hostilities, Poland has lost all its industrial regions and cultural centers. Warsaw no longer exists as the capital of Poland. The Polish government has collapsed and shows no signs of life. Therefore, the treaties concluded between the USSR and Poland have ceased to operate. Abandoned to its fate and left without leadership, Poland has become a fertile field for any accidental and unexpected contingency, which may constitute a threat to the USSR. Because of this, the Soviet Government, which had been neutral hitherto, can no longer maintain a neutral attitude toward these facts.

Nor can the Soviet Government remain indifferent when its blood brothers, the Ukrainians and Belorussians living on Polish territory, having been abandoned to their fate, are left without protection.

In view of this state of affairs, the Soviet Government has instructed the high command of the Red Army to order troops across the frontier and to take under their protection the lives and property of the population of Western Ukraine and Western White Russia.

At the same time, the Soviet Government intends to take every step to deliver the Polish people from the disastrous war into which they have been plunged by their unwise leaders, and to give them an opportunity to live a peaceful life.<sup>136</sup>

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135. On the negotiation of the secret protocol at the Kremlin during the night of August 23–24, see Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 381–399; for German documents, see DGFP D VII, nos. 205, 206, 210. Herwarth writes that he was sitting at the telephone in the German embassy, passing Soviet requests to Hitler, as transmitted by Ribbentrop. He was surprised that Hitler approved each request immediately, see *Against Two Evils*, 165. For the addition of the Pisa River to the line of August 23, in the agreement signed by Molotov and Schulenburg on August 28, see GK 2, no. 614, DVP 1939 I, no. 507.

136. Potemkin note to Grzybowski, September 17, 1939, PWB no. 175, DPSR I, no. 43, Degras, SDFP III, 374; Russian text: DiM VII, no. 105, *Dokumenty*

Molotov repeated these statements in his radio speech of the same day. To his German partners he explained that these declarations were necessary for both foreign and domestic opinion.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, Soviet opinion was shocked by the pact in August and once the Red Army moved in in September, some citizens were critical of the USSR's apparent collusion with the Germans in the destruction of Poland.<sup>138</sup>

As for the date of Soviet aggression against Poland, the cease-fire signed by the Soviet and Japanese commanders in Nomonhan/Ghalkin Gol on September 16, 1939, does not seem to have been decisive for Stalin's agreement that evening to German pleas for Soviet military action and the order that the Red Army move into eastern Poland the next day. In fact, the Ukrainian and Belorussian fronts had been mobilized on September 7 and only awaited marching orders. These were dated originally September 14, but the date of readiness, end September 16, was inserted later. It was also on this date that the Germans informed Stalin of the allegedly impending fall of Warsaw, and this news, together with reports that the Polish government had crossed the border into Romania, may have been decisive for the Soviet leader, for if the Polish state no longer existed, this could at least technically absolve the USSR of attacking it. However, contrary to the claim regarding the fall of Warsaw, which was based on German disinformation, and proclaimed by Molotov that day on the radio—and repeated by German

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*Vneshnei Politiki*, vol. XXII, 1939, *Kniga II* (Moscow, 1992) no.597 (henceforth: DVP 1939 II]; for Potemkin record of the conversation, see: *ibid.*, no. 596; for Grzybowski's account, see his "Final Report," PWB no.184, *DPSR I*, no.69. The same note was sent to foreign ambassadors in Moscow, see Steinhardt to Secretary of State, September 17, 1939, *FRUS 1939 I*, 428–429.

137. In a previous version of this statement, the Soviet government was to say that it was coming to help their Ukrainian and Belorussian brothers threatened by the German Wehrmacht. Molotov explained to the Germans that this was to justify the Soviet intervention in the eyes of the masses, so it would not appear as the aggressor, but Ribbentrop voiced strong objections, see *DGFP D*, VIII (London, Washington, 1954), nos. 46, 70, 78. For Molotov's radio speech of September 17, 1939, see Degras, *SDFP*, III, 374–376.

138. NKVD informants in Leningrad reported shock and confusion among the people at the nonaggression pact, seen as a treaty with "the fascists." When the Red Army entered Poland, there was talk about "secret treaties" and Soviet-German collusion in the destruction of Poland; see Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia. Terror, propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1914* (Cambridge and New York, 1997), 98–99. See also the memoirs of an erstwhile communist, then a teenager in the USSR, later a professor at Yale University, Wolfgang Leonhard, *Betrayal. The Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939* (New York, 1989), ch. 2., "The Pact and the People in the Soviet Union," 45–72.



historian Fleischhauer fifty years later<sup>139</sup>—the capital was still defending itself. As for the Polish government, it was still on Polish soil. On September 17, Beck telegraphed the Polish embassies in Paris and London as follows:

Ambassador Grzybowski has refused to accept M. Molotov's note and has presented a protest against the aggression. I have approved his attitude, instructing him to ask for his passports and to withdraw from Moscow. The Polish Government, which is functioning on Polish territory and is in contact with the Diplomatic Corps, has made a protest against the Soviet insinuation. Our frontier troops have resisted the invasion.

He also instructed the Polish embassies in London and Paris to protest the Soviet invasion.<sup>140</sup>

That same day, however, on learning of the speedy Red Army advance into Poland, which threatened the security of the Polish government itself, the latter decided to cross into neighboring Romania. By this time, having retreated east and southeast ahead of the German armies, they were located, together with the diplomatic corps—which included U.S. Ambassador Anthony J. Drexel Biddle—and high command, on the Polish-Romanian border. Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz issued an order to Polish troops not to fight the Red Army unless attacked or threatened with disarmament. President Mościcki issued an address to the nation, condemning the German and Soviet aggression against Poland and explaining the government was going abroad to secure the constitutional continuity of Polish sovereignty.<sup>141</sup> The government and high command crossed into Romania

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139. For Soviet-German talks on September 16–17, see: *DGFP D VIII*, nos. 78, 80. For Fleischhauer on Stalin sending the Red Army into eastern Poland only after the fall of Warsaw, see *Der Pakt*, 385. For the marching orders to the Belorussian and Ukrainian Fronts, originally dated September 14, then changed to September 16, see Russian Katyn documents: *Katyń. Plenniki nieob'iaвленnoi Voiny*, edited by Nataliia S. Lebedeva, Wojciech Materski et al. (Moscow, 1997), doc. nos. 3, 4; Polish text, *Katyń. Dokumenty Zbrodni, 1, Jeńcy nie wypowiedzianej zbrodni* (Warsaw, 1995), doc. no.3 and Supplement 1.

140. For Beck telegram to Polish embassies, September 17, also notes presented by Polish ambassadors in London and Paris protesting the invasion, see *PWB*, nos. 176–178; for Grzybowski telegram to Foreign Ministry and Polish government protest, see *DPSR I*, nos. 44, 45.

141. For Śmigły-Rydz order to Polish troops of September 17, see *ibid.*, doc. no. 6. For a photo copy of President Mościcki's address to the Polish nation, including handwritten corrections, see Dariusz Baliszewski and Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert, eds., *Prawdziwa historia Polaków. Ilustrowane wypisy źródłowe 1939–1945*, vol. I, 1939–1942 (Warsaw, 1999), doc. no.80, 73. For Ambassador Drexel Biddle's report on the war and retreat to Romania, see "The Polish-German Conflict and The Embassy's Activities," *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War. The Diplomatic Papers of A. J. Drexel Biddle Jr. United States Ambassador to Poland*,

on the night of September 17–18, with the intention of proceeding to France to continue the fight there and with a French invitation to do so. However, they were interned in Romania though they were formally still recognized by the Polish diplomatic representatives abroad and by Poland's allies as the Polish government until a new one was established in Paris on September 30.<sup>142</sup> Warsaw defended itself until there was no food or water, and capitulated after a three-week siege on September 27, while General Franciszek Kleeberg's troops, the last Polish force fighting the Germans, laid down its arms at Kock on October 5.<sup>143</sup> There were also some pitched battles between Polish and Soviet troops, and the town of Grodno defended itself for three days.<sup>144</sup>

One day after the surrender of Warsaw, a German-Soviet "Boundary and Friendship Treaty" was signed in Moscow. It established a new frontier between the two countries in Poland, running in the north well to the east of the August 23 line. It gave more Polish territory to Germany (Lublin and the eastern part of Warsaw province) in exchange for German recognition of all of Lithuania—except for the southern part of the country including the Memel [Klaipeda] territory—as belonging to the Soviet sphere of interest, for which Stalin undertook to pay an additional \$7 million in gold. Also, the Soviet Union gave the Wilno [Vilnius] region to Lithuania. One of the secret protocols signed on September 28 provided for cooperation against any "Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other party,"<sup>145</sup> that is, against any Polish attempts to restore a Polish state. The new German-Soviet frontier

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1937–1939, Philip V. Cannistraro, Edward D. Wynot, Jr., Theodore P. Kovalev, eds. (Columbus, OH, 1976), 94–165.

142. On the Polish government's retreat from Warsaw eastward, then south-east to the Polish-Romanian border, and its internment in Romania, see Anna M. Cienciala, "Internowanie rządu R.P. w Rumunii we wrześniu 1939 r." *Niepodległość*, vol. XII [po wznowieniu] (New York and London, 1989), 18–65.

143. See Steven Zaloga & Victor Madej, *The Polish Campaign 1939* (New York, 1985, reprint 1991), 103–152.

144. On the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland, *ibid.*, 152–146. For a comprehensive collection of mostly Russian documents, translated into Polish, on the operations of the Soviet Ukrainian and Belorussian fronts in Poland, September 1939, see Czesław Grzelak, Stanisław Jaczyński, Eugeniusz Kozłowski, eds., *Agresja sowiecka na Polskę w świetle dokumentów. 17 września 1939* (Warsaw, 1994, 1995, 1996), vols. 1–3. For a brief Russian account, see Mikhail Mel'tiukhov, *Sovetsko-Pol'skie Voiny. Voennno-politicheskoe protivostoiianie 1918–1939 gg* (Moscow, 2001), 303–350. The author's interpretation of interwar Polish foreign policy generally follows the old Soviet line.

145. For the English language texts of the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty and secret protocols of September 28, 1939 see *DGFP D VIII* (London and Washington, 1954), nos. 157–160, *DPSR I*, nos. 52–55; Russian texts, *DVP 1939 II*, nos. 640–643.

in Poland became known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Line, similar in the center and south both to the Curzon Line—proposed by British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon as an armistice line between the Soviet and Polish armies in July 1920—and to the Polish-Soviet frontier established in 1944–45.

It is clear from a study of available Russian and German documents that Polish foreign policy did not play any part in Stalin's decision to align with Hitler. Even at the time, a high Soviet official admitted as much. Deputy Foreign Commissar Solomon S. Lozovskii told a Norwegian diplomat on August 23, that Poland's independent attitude had nothing to do with the conclusion of the German-Soviet pact, because political relations followed naturally from the economic agreement. He also touted the nonaggression pact as a peaceful measure, pointing out that previous Soviet nonaggression agreements always contained a clause that if one of the parties became an aggressor, this did not involve the other.<sup>146</sup> This indicates that he was either ignorant of the details of the pact, which is unlikely, or deliberately misled the Norwegian diplomat. It is true, of course, that the Soviet attitude toward Poland was always one of deep distrust. Her government was portrayed as pro-German and fascist. It was expected to give in to German demands, and even to join the Germans in an attack on the USSR. Still, before Britain granted a guarantee to Poland, Stalin seems to have toyed briefly with the idea of a Popular Front government in Warsaw, presumably to be organized and perhaps led by Polish communists. But he had dissolved the Polish Communist Party in 1938 on charges of infiltration by Polish police, so he allowed the establishment of an "Initiative Group" in Paris in January 1939. These were selected Polish communists whom he apparently viewed as the embryo of a new Polish Communist Party. They published three issues of a bulletin up to and including April 1939, calling for a Polish coalition government to resist Germany. However, after the British guarantee, they called for its overthrow. Stalin shelved them in April, when he apparently decided they were no longer needed.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps he perceived a German attack on Poland as more likely because of Polish acceptance of the British guarantee, and decided at this time to try for an agreement with Hitler to partition Poland.

Whatever the case may be, Soviet policy toward Poland in spring and summer 1939 was characterized by friendly declarations as well as talk of Soviet help and benevolent neutrality. At the same time, however, great distrust is documented in the correspondence between Litvinov, then

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146. Record of Lozovskii conversation with Norwegian chargé d'affaires, M. Bolstad, August 23, 1939, DVP 1939 I, no. 486.

147. On the Paris Initiative Group, see Anna M. Cienciala, "The Activities of Polish Communists as a Source for Stalin's Policy Toward Poland in World War II," *International History Review*, vol. VII, no. 1 (1986): 129–145.

Molotov, with the Soviet ambassadors in London and Paris, as well as by Soviet demands regarding the prospective political and military alliance with France and Britain. No official Soviet offer of cooperation was ever made to Poland, nor was there any official proposal for the passage of Soviet troops, though a low-level Soviet sounding was recorded in Wilno in spring 1939.<sup>148</sup> In fact, Lithuania was not included in the Soviet list of states to be guaranteed by the Soviet Union and the Western powers, perhaps because it did not border on the USSR. Also, Litvinov may have assumed—or pretended to assume—that Poland would, in her own interest, come to the defense of Lithuania in case of German aggression. No official Soviet proposal was ever made to the Polish government that Polish officers participate in the Moscow negotiations. Indeed, it is possible that if the Polish government had agreed to the Soviet demand for troop passage, Stalin could have portrayed this at the appropriate time as sanctioning the Soviet occupation and then annexation of eastern Poland. The latter took place officially in early November 1939, when the Supreme Soviet acceded to the “requests” of the Soviets [assemblies] of western Belorussia and western Ukraine [East Galicia]—elected under Soviet rules and in an atmosphere of terror—for union with the Soviet Belorussian and Ukrainian Republics. According to wartime Polish estimates, about one million Polish citizens were deported from these territories into the depths of the USSR, of whom about 50 percent were ethnic Poles and 30 percent were Jews, with Ukrainians and Belorussians making up the rest. (Soviet figures, compiled at the time by the NKVD and released after 1991, put the number of deported Polish citizens at about 325,000, which seems too low). Furthermore, about four hundred thousand Poles are estimated to have been killed by Soviet authorities in former eastern Poland between September 17, 1939, and June 21, 1941. Finally, according to Soviet sources, of the some two hundred thousand Polish prisoners of war taken in September 1939, 21,857 officers and some civilians were held in special camps as well as prisons in Belorussia and Ukraine. They were murdered by special NKVD troops on orders signed by the Soviet Politburo on March 5, 1940.<sup>149</sup> That is how

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148. See note 57 above.

149. On Soviet-style elections in eastern Poland, October 1939, and Soviet rule there, see Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad. The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, N.J., 1988); also Keith Sword, ed., *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939–41* (New York, 1991), and his, *Deportation and Exile. Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–48* (Basingstoke, England and New York, 1994). The number of deported Polish citizens was estimated by the Polish government-in-exile at about 1,200,000, but NKVD figures released after 1991, put them at about 325,000, which seems too low; see Marek Tuszyński, “Soviet War Crimes against Poland During the Second World War and Its Aftermath. A Review of the Factual Record and Outstanding Questions,”

Stalin brought a “peaceful life” to the Polish population of western Ukraine and Belorussia. At the same time, the “liberation” of the Ukrainians and Belorussians meant terror, arrests, and deportations for “enemies of the Soviet people,” with collectivization of the land and nationalization of all means of production imposed on the population.

So when did Stalin decide to align the USSR with Nazi Germany? On the basis of all the documentation available up to now, it is clear that the “Vozhd” was very interested in an agreement with Hitler, if not as far back as 1934—as Krivitsky claims—then certainly in 1935–36, as evidenced by the proposals made by Litvinov to Schulenburg in May 1935, and even more so by Kandelaki to Schacht at the turn of 1936–37. If Stalin had not decided to seek cooperation with Germany earlier, he might have done so after the British guarantee to Poland on March 31, 1939, which he apparently suspected of being directed against the USSR. Or he might have done so with the dismissal of Litvinov on May 3 that year, as surmised by Jonathan Haslam and Lev I. Ginzburg, and affirmed years later by Andrei Gromyko. If this was so, the primary goal of Soviet diplomacy, at least from this time onward, was an agreement with Germany. In any case, Molotov told Schulenburg on May 20 that a political basis had to be found for the economic agreement between the two countries. After a hiatus in the Molotov-Schulenburg talks—though talks continued in Berlin—the Germans became anxious to make a deal. On August 11, 1939, the Soviet chargé in Berlin, Georgii Astakhov, listed the territorial concessions the Germans were willing to make and Molotov found them of great interest, but said it was now up to the Germans. Perhaps the final decision to start concrete negotiations was made that day, as Yakovlev claimed in December 1989, saying it was due to news of Hitler’s impending attack on Poland any time after August 25. However, there is no documentary evidence that Hitler made this decision before he was sure that he could strike a deal with Stalin, and this occurred on August 21. In any case, the Germans were told on August 15 that they could send a negotiator to Moscow. On August 17, Molotov

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(note 149 continued) *Polish Review*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1999): 183–216. For a brief study of Soviet oppression of Poles and Polish citizens, citing NKVD documents, see Stanisław Ciesielski, Wojciech Materski and Andrzej Paczkowski, eds., *Represje sowieckie wobec Polaków i obywateli polskich* (Warsaw, 2000). For Russian documents on the arrest, imprisonment, and mass murder of Polish prisoners of war in the western USSR in spring 1940, see Nataliia Lebedeva, Wojciech Materski et al., eds., *Katyń. Plenniki i neob’iavlennoi voyny*, and, *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni. Tom I. Jeńcy niewypowiedzianej wojny* (see note 140 above); Materski, Lebedeva, et al., eds., *Katyń. Dokumenty Zbrodni; Tom II. Zagłada* (Warsaw, 1998), and Lebedeva, Materski et al., eds., *Katyń. Mart 1940—sentiabr 2000 g. Rasstrel. Sud’by zhiyikh. Ekho Katyni. Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2001). The publication of an English language volume by Yale University Press, edited by the author of this article, is expected in 2003.

handed a Soviet aide-mémoire to Schulenburg, proposing a nonaggression pact, and on August 19 he gave the German ambassador the Soviet draft of this pact. Yakovlev stated this was done on that day because Stalin allegedly heard from “documented sources” that the Western powers and Poland would not change their attitude. Fleischhauer writes that Stalin made his decision on August 21, when it was clear the Western powers had not persuaded the Poles to grant the key Soviet demand for passage of troops, also because of the Soviet-Japanese fighting in the Far East. However, Yakovlev said the *decision* to negotiate with the Germans had been made on August 11. If August 21 was the date of the final decision to make a deal with Berlin, Stalin was likely to have made it because he could not afford to refuse Hitler’s demand that Ribbentrop arrive in Moscow by August 23.

### Summation

While the lack of Russian documents on the decision-making process at this time does not allow fixing the exact date of Stalin’s decision, it is clear that Astakhov’s talks with German officials in Berlin in the period from mid-April to August 12 paved the way for the Nazi-Soviet agreement. Gorlov’s thesis, supported by Roberts, that the absence of any instructions from Molotov to Astakhov during this time proves the latter was acting on his own initiative is clearly untenable. Not only did German officials, including Ribbentrop, treat Astakhov as a bona fide representative of the Soviet government, but it is also clear that he was in close touch with Molotov all the time. Indeed, even Astakhov’s published correspondence with Moscow shows that he was not acting on his own. Thus, it is quite possible that Stalin and Molotov decided on an agreement with Germany at least as early as Litvinov’s dismissal in early May, if not earlier, and then played a consummate diplomatic game until they were sure that Hitler would grant all their demands. This assumption is supported by Astakhov’s Berlin conversations, as well as by the “leaks” provided to the German embassy in London from the “reliable source” who was most likely the Soviet agent in the Foreign Office Communications Department, Francis Herbert King. It is striking that very few such hints and leaks of German-Soviet negotiations were made to the Western powers, and those came from the Germans who informed the French. Also, Molotov’s tone in his meetings with the British and French diplomats in Moscow was almost always rough, and even rude, while Western policy was strongly criticized in the Soviet press as insincere at best and exploitive at worst. This was in contrast to the generally polite tone adopted by the Soviet press toward Germany and by Molotov toward Schulenburg.

What is particularly noticeable is the parallelism between the German-Soviet talks and the Franco-British-Soviet negotiations between mid-April and the end of July. This became even more striking in August. Thus,

Astakhov told the Germans on August 12—the day that Franco-British-Soviet negotiations opened in Moscow—that the Soviet government was ready to negotiate and would accept a German negotiator in the Soviet capital. Stalin's readiness to sign a nonaggression pact was expressed by Molotov to Schulenburg on August 17, the day that military negotiations with the French and British were suspended after Stalin learned of a message from Hitler to be delivered by Schulenburg. This was before intensive Anglo-French efforts took place in Warsaw to persuade the Poles to agree to the passage of Soviet troops. Molotov handed the Soviet draft of a nonaggression pact to Schulenburg in the late afternoon of August 19, before the French government, and presumably Doumenc in Moscow, received the news of the Polish refusal that day. It is possible that Stalin judged the time was right to negotiate an agreement with Germany sometime in August 1939, but if so, this was the culmination of a long, preparatory period. At the same time, it is most unlikely that Stalin only made up his mind on August 21, allegedly because he learned that the French and British delegations failed to receive a positive reply from Poland regarding the passage of Soviet troops. In fact, Stalin seems to have expected a negative outcome to these military negotiations. If he did, he may have agreed to them in order to pressure Hitler into an agreement with the USSR—and perhaps, at the same time, receive a Western sanction for entering eastern Poland. As for the Japanese-Soviet fighting in the Far East, it did not amount to a full-scale war. Furthermore, a highly placed Soviet intelligence agent in Tokyo (Richard Sorge) reported in June that Japan was not planning to attack the USSR, so it is unlikely that this fighting played a significant role in Stalin's decision.

Did Stalin fear a German attack on the USSR? Perhaps, but German documents do not indicate that Hitler intended to attack the Soviet Union through Poland in 1939, and Soviet intelligence should have reported this to Stalin. D. C. Watt may be right in his judgment that Stalin expected Hitler to attack France and Britain, not the USSR. Whatever the case may be, one may ask whether Hitler would have attacked Poland if the USSR had an alliance with France and Britain? Setting this question aside, it is clear that the lack of a clause abrogating the German-Soviet nonaggression pact in case one of the two parties engaged in an aggressive war against a third country—a clause present in other nonaggression pacts signed by the USSR before August 1939<sup>150</sup>—was certainly a strong encouragement for Hitler to attack Poland. Bearing all this in mind, can Stalin's policy be

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150. For example, art. 2 of the Polish-Soviet nonaggression pact of July 25, 1932, stated: "If one of the Contracting Parties commits an act of aggression against a third State, the other Contracting Party shall have the right to be released from the present Treaty without previous denunciation.," *DPSR*, I, no. 6.

described simply as appeasement of Germany, and can he be viewed as a wise statesman for concluding the nonaggression pact with Hitler?<sup>151</sup>

The lack of authoritative Soviet documentation allows the debate on dating Stalin's key policy decision to continue, and the same holds true of the interpretation of Stalin's motives for concluding the pact with Hitler. As far as short-term goals are concerned, one may, for example, ask whether Stalin thought he could sign a military alliance with the Western powers if he obtained their agreement to enter eastern Poland while bound by a nonaggression pact to Nazi Germany? Daladier, for one, was certainly willing to let Soviet troops enter eastern Poland, and presumably stay there, as witness his cable to Doumenc of August 21. The British agreed to this on August 24. This may have encouraged the Soviet leader to speculate that he could have his cake and eat it too, that is, he could have both an alliance with the Western powers and a nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the fact that, between August 23 and 25, both Molotov and the Soviet press proclaimed there was no contradiction between a military alliance with the Western powers and a nonaggression pact with Germany. The Soviet ambassador in Poland also talked as if the situation had not changed. Indeed, as late as September 2, when Poland was already under German attack, he suggested the Poles should ask the USSR for supplies, mentioning Voroshilov's positive statement on this as published in the Soviet press on August 27.<sup>152</sup> Was this simply camouflage aimed to strengthen Polish morale and so make the Poles fight the Germans as long as possible, or was it something else? Did the Soviet talk on August 23–25 that both the pact and the alliance were not inherently

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151. "Das staatsmannische Interesse Stalins bei Abschluss dieses Paktes bestand in einer Politik der Beschwichtigung, der Pakt selbst war vorrangig, ein Instrument der sowjetischen beschwichtigungspolitik." Fleischhauer, *Der Pakt*, 434.

152. Beck informed the Polish embassy in London on September 2, that the Soviet ambassador had asked why Poland was not negotiating with the Soviet government regarding supplies, since the Voroshilov interview had opened up this possibility, *PWB*, no.171, *DPSR*, I, no.36. Indeed, on August 27, *Izvestiia* had reported Voroshilov's statement that aid in raw materials and war materials was a commercial, not a military question, so no military convention was needed to supply Poland with them, see *PWB*, no 170, also Degras, *SDFP* III, 362, Russian text after *Izvestiia*. *DiM*, VII, no.104. However, on September 8, Molotov informed the Polish ambassador that British and French intervention, of which Voroshilov was unaware when granting the [press] interview, had created an entirely new situation, so the USSR was prepared to supply Poland only with the raw materials provided for in the quotas for the current year, *PWB* no. 172, *DPSR*, I, no. 39; this document and Molotov's statement of September 8 to Grzybowski were not published in *DVP* 1939 II. Of course, France and Britain were not at war with Germany until September 3, while Voroshilov's statement was published on August 27.



contradictory reflect Stalin's policy? It is possible that he may have allowed talk on the compatibility of an alliance with the Western powers and a nonaggression pact with Germany to secure Western agreement to his demand regarding Red Army passage through Poland, or to exert pressure on Hitler to make more concessions to the USSR, or both. Of course, without access to relevant Soviet documents, these questions will remain unanswered.

There are also questions concerning Stalin's long-term aims in concluding the pact with Hitler. As mentioned earlier, some Western, a few Russian, and most Polish historians believe that Stalin deliberately ensured Hitler's attack on Poland, thus risking the outbreak of a European war in which the USSR would gain some territory, stay on the sidelines, and then take advantage of the European powers' exhaustion to expand both Soviet power and communism. This view seemed to find confirmation in a German newspaper report of July 1996 on a documentary "find" by a Russian scholar. This was the text of a speech that Stalin allegedly made to the Politburo on August 19, 1939. As it turned out, the speech had been published as long as ago as 1939, and Stalin denied it at the time. Some historians believe it to be a forgery, while others think it is genuine. Neither opinion can be proved correct without other documents to confirm it, but the date of August 19 was cited by Yakovlev for Stalin's final decision, and the document does reflect Soviet thinking as recorded elsewhere. For these reasons the text is given below:

Peace or war? This question has entered into its critical phase. Its solution depends entirely on the position taken by the Soviet Union. We are absolutely convinced that if we conclude an alliance treaty with France and Great Britain, Germany will see itself obliged to draw back from Poland and to seek a *modus vivendi* with the western powers. In this way, war could be avoided and then, later development of this state of affairs will take on a character dangerous to us.

On the other hand, if we accept the proposal of Germany, that you know, to conclude with her a nonaggression pact, Germany will certainly attack Poland and the intervention of England and France will be inevitable.

In these circumstances, we will have a very good chance to stay out of the conflict, and we will be able to wait our turn with advantage to us. This is precisely what our interest demands.

Thus, our choice is clear: we should accept the German proposal and send the Anglo-French missions back to their countries with a courteous refusal.

It is not difficult to foresee the advantage that we will draw from this way of proceeding. It is evident to us that Poland will be destroyed even before England and France are able to come to her aid. In this case, Germany cedes to us a part of Poland right up to the outskirts of Warsaw—together with Ukrainian Galicia.

Germany leaves us complete freedom of action in the three Baltic states. She does not oppose the return of Bessarabia to Russia. She is ready to cede us Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary as our sphere of influence.

There remains the question of Yugoslavia, the solution of which depends on the position taken by Italy. If Italy remains at Germany's side, she will demand that Yugoslavia be included in her sphere of influence, and it is also through Yugoslavia that she will obtain access to the Adriatic. But if Italy does not march with Germany, the latter will have access to the Adriatic at Italian expense, and in that case Yugoslavia will pass into our sphere of influence.

That is, if Germany is victorious in the war.

However, we should foresee the possibilities which will result from the defeat as well as from the victory of Germany. Let us examine the case of a German defeat. England and France will then have enough power to occupy Berlin and destroy Germany, and we will not be able to give effective help to the latter.

Therefore, our goal is that Germany be able to carry on the war as long as possible, so that England and France are tired and exhausted to such a point that they are no longer able to knock out Germany.

Consequently our position is that while remaining neutral, we help Germany economically, furnishing her with raw materials and food products. But it is obvious that our aid should not exceed a certain limit so as not to compromise our economic situation and not weaken the power of our army.

At the same time, we should, in a general way, conduct an active communist propaganda, especially in the Anglo-French bloc, and especially in France. We should expect that, in this country, our party will be obliged, in time of war, to abandon legal measures and move to clandestine activity. We know that this activity requires a lot of money, but we should consent to these sacrifices without hesitation. If this preparatory work is duly carried out, German security will be assured. The latter can contribute to the sovietisation of France.

Now, let us examine the second hypothesis, that of German victory. Some [people] are of the opinion that this possibility represents the greatest danger to us. There is some truth in this assertion, but it would be erroneous to think that this danger is as near and as great as some imagine.

If Germany wins, she will come out of the war too tired to make war on us for the following decade. Her main concerns will be to keep watch over defeated England and France to prevent them from recovering.

On the other hand, a victorious Germany will have vast colonies at her disposal. Their exploitation and adaptation to German methods will absorb Germany to an equal extent for several decades. It is evident that Germany will be too busy elsewhere to turn against us.

Comrades, concluded Stalin, I have expounded my considerations to you. I repeat that it is in your\* interest that war breaks out between the Reich and Anglo-French bloc. It is essential for us that this war lasts as long as possible, so that the two sides are exhausted. It is for these reasons that we should accept the pact proposed by Germany and work so that the war, once declared, is prolonged to the maximum. At the same time, we should intensify economic work\*\* in the belligerent countries, so that we are well prepared for the moment when the war ends.

As it turned out, the German newspaper report was based on a document found a few years earlier by the Russian historian Tatiana Bushuyeva, who discovered it among documents seized from the Nazis and then stored

in the former Soviet war booty archive. She published it Russian translation in the Russian journal *Novy Mir* in October 1994. Bushueva believed that since the text was in French, it was probably written by a French-speaking Comintern member present at the meeting.<sup>153</sup> There is no confirmation of the text from Russian sources, and many historians believe it is a forgery.<sup>154</sup> However, on September 7, Georgii M. Dimitrov, then head of the Comintern, noted Stalin as saying:

We have nothing against their fighting and weakening each other. It would not be bad if German hands shook up the wealthier capitalist countries (especially England). Hitler, though he does not understand or desire it, is shaking up and undermining the capitalist system.

On the Soviet Union's role in the war he said: "*We can maneuver, support one side against the other, so that they fight each other all the better.*"<sup>155</sup> It would be strange, indeed, if Stalin did not have such thoughts before the conclusion of the pact with Hitler. Furthermore, there are Czech and Polish reports on statements made by high Soviet officials in 1940–41

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153. \*"*votre*" [your interest] should probably be "*notre*." [our interest]. \*\* It is not clear what is meant by "economic work"; perhaps it was to organize worker unrest so as to impede war production. The English translation by the author of this article is from the original French text as printed in Eberhard Jäckel, "Über eine angebliche Rede Stalins vom 19 August 1939," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, no. 4 (Munich, 1958), 581–582. For the German article of 1996, see Carl Gustav Stroh, Moscow, "Stalins Strategie für Krieg und Frieden. Geheime Dokumente beweisen: Sowjetischer Diktator hat Hitlers Angriff auf Polen einkalkuliert," *Die Welt*, July 16, 1996; Russian translation from French by T. Bushueva in section "Knizhnoe Obozrenie," *Novy Mir*, 10 (1994): 232–233..

154. According to Eberhard Jäckel, the text of the alleged Stalin speech, first summarized in a report by the French news agency *Havas*, was provided by an unnamed source to Henry Ruffin, the *Havas* correspondent in Geneva. Jäckel noted that the "speech" was published in Geneva in the *Revue du Droit International* no.3 for July–September 1939, and that Stalin's denial appeared in *Pravda*, 30 November 1939. The denial was also published in the German press, while the text was reprinted in the Geneva journal in 1941 and in the Vichy France *Revue Universelle* in 1944. Jäckel concludes that Stalin's motives, as portrayed in the alleged speech, were "historically incorrect," and that it was a piece of "prophetic fiction" written by a specialist on Bolshevism, see: Jäckel, "Über eine angebliche rede Stalins," 589.

155. Emphasis added, A M..C. See F. I. Firsov, in *Komintern: opyt, traditsii, uroki*, Moscow, 1989, 21; cit. in Nataliia S. Lebedeva, M.M. Narinskii, eds., *Komintern i Vtoraia Mirovaia Voina, chast 1 do 22 iuniii 1941g.*, Moscow, 1994, 10–11. Ivo Banac, ed., *The Diary of Georgii Dimitrov, 1933–1949*, New Haven & London, 2003, pp. 115–116.

about Soviet plans for the Red Army to march into an exhausted Europe, which would then become communist.<sup>156</sup>

It is, of course, possible to explain Stalin's decision to align the USSR with Germany because he expected the latter to invade Poland without any significant military reaction by France and Britain, and because he needed time to rearm. On this hypothesis, it would be obviously in the Soviet interest to prevent the Germans from taking all of Poland and perhaps Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia as well, while making an ally of Finland. However, it seems rather restrictive to view Stalin's policy only in terms of traditional "realpolitik," based on the need to assure Soviet security while totally ignoring the role of communist ideology. Instead, it seems more appropriate to see Stalin's policy in 1939 as a combination of "realpolitik" and the old goal of world revolution—in this case, the establishment of Soviet-dominated communist governments in Europe after an exhausting war.

In conclusion, it seems most likely Stalin decided sometime in spring 1939 to align with Hitler. He must have calculated that he could risk having the German army and air force much nearer to Moscow through a partition of Poland, because he expected Hitler to become bogged down in a long war with France and Britain. Therefore, he conducted negotiations with the Western powers in order to pressure Hitler into an agreement with the USSR. Such a policy would form part of the long-term Soviet goal of gaining lasting security for the USSR, which was always identified with the spread of communism across the world, but first of all in Europe. Like Lenin in 1917–19, Stalin seems to have expected such a state of affairs only in the wake of an exhausting war. Again, like Lenin, he seems to have viewed Germany as the key European country in an expanded communist

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156. Two Czech reports written in 1940–41 mention statements by Soviet officials about plans to communize Europe, and one even forecast an autonomous Czech republic as part of the USSR; see reports to President Edvard Beneš of November 6, 1940 and August 10, 1941, Jan Némeczek et al., eds., *československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939–1945. Dokumenty, díl 1 (březen 1939—červen 1943)* (Prague, 1998), nos. 98, 163. Statements by high NKVD officials on the Red Army marching to the English Channel and a postwar communist Europe were recorded by a Polish cavalry captain, a surviving prisoner of war, interviewed for military service by the head of the NKVD, Lavrenty P. Beria and his deputy, Feodor A. Merkulov in fall 1940, see Narcyz Łopianowski, *Rozmowy z NKWD, 1940–1941* (Warsaw, 1990), 32, 85 ff. Łopianowski joined a group of Polish officers willing to cooperate with the Soviet government, led by General Zygmunt Berling, but did so in order to report on the group to his own commanding general, see *ibid.*, 93.

bloc, which included Poland as the land bridge between Germany and the USSR. Finally, all the available documentation indicates that Poland did not play any role in Stalin's decision to align with Hitler in 1939, except as a convenient scapegoat for breaking off the negotiations for a Soviet alliance with France and Britain. Stalin's view of Poland is probably best reflected in a statement noted by Dimitrov during the latter's meeting with the "Vozhd" on September 7, 1939. Stalin characterized it as "fascist state" which oppressed Ukrainians and Belorussians, and said:

The destruction of this state in present circumstances would mean one bourgeois, fascist, state less! Would it be a bad thing if, as a result of the defeat of Poland, we expanded the socialist system to new territories and populations?<sup>157</sup>

It is more than likely that these were also Stalin's thoughts about Poland for a long time before he concluded his fateful agreement with Hitler in August 1939.

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157. See Lebedeva and Narinskii, *Komintern*, cit. note 155 above; trans. A.M.C.